

Running in the Night by chloerigby

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Summary: The town of Hawkins has been turned upside down with the news that Will Byers has suddenly gone missing. Teddi Larsson and Billy Hargrove are gonna get to the bottom of things. Season one AU.

1. Chapter One: What Goes Bump in the Night

A/N:I just really wanted to write a fic where Billy and Teddi have lived in Hawkins their whole lives and take on Demogorgons because they take their babysitting duties too seriously. Teddi is gonna be the token horror movie character that's always saying "I've got a bad feeling about this" and Billy is gonna hate every minute of it. Greg Larsson and Neil Hargrove are gonna be mentioned but those assholes are gonna be taking a backseat this time around because let's face it: we all hate them. So I hope y'all enjoy!

Sunday nights in Hawkins were usually quiet, but this one in particular was a little *too* quiet for Teddi's tastes. It was almost hard for her to believe that only a half hour ago there had been three fifth graders arguing with Keith at the prize counter. "We're tired of the shitty finger traps, Keith!" one of them had nearly spat up at him.

"Not my fault that your little baby fingers are too small for the trap to do the trapping. *No prize refunds.*" that of course ended with a cherry slurpee getting thrown at Keith's '75 Hyundai Pony and Teddi secretly trading out the finger traps for three lightup yo-yos.

Now they had closed up shop for the night, and Keith had headed home to give his car a hose off. Usually Teddi didn't mind closing out the Palace Arcade. Ever since Keith had promoted her to assistant manager about a month ago, Teddi would stay behind about an hour after all of the kids had gone home and clean up for the next day. It was an excuse to stay away from home a little bit longer, and an extra five bucks in her pocket.

But for some reason tonight she was filled with dread, and it seemed like she couldn't sweep the floors fast enough. Maybe it was because she watched too many horror movies. This cold November night felt like it was straight out one of those slasher movies she loved so much. "Yeah, like Leatherface is roaming around Hawkins looking for teens to kill," she muttered to herself. The idea was silly. Imagining some killer hiding behind one of the games waiting until her back was turned so he could strike when she least expected it.

Still, Teddi couldn't help but throw a quick glance over her shoulder

and out the front windows and into the empty parking lot. Just to make sure. Her van sat alone under one of the street lamps waiting for her, but other than that there wasn't a single person or car in sight. It was almost like everyone had just vanished and she was the only person left in town. Teddi shook her shoulders to try and get rid of the goosebumps that were forming on her arms and tried to hum along to the music she had playing over the radio.

The feeling had nearly gone away. She was crouched down, singing along to the Romantics and sweeping the pile of dirt, dust and other miscellaneous things that seemed to fall off all the kids that came in for the day when the radio cut out. The voices sounded garbled at first, like the signal had been lost suddenly, before the music turned into total static. The lights overhead whired and flashed, and the screens of the game consoles popped and crackled before they all went black. Suddenly the only thing she could hear was how heavily she was breathing.

"What the *fuck*?" Teddi jolted upright, gripping onto the broom and ready to use it as a makeshift weapon. But before masked killer could come running out with a knife, or before Teddi could even fully comprehend what was even happening, the radio's signal cleared, the lights came back on and the arcade came right back to life. Teddi blinked. Maybe the rest of the cleaning could wait until tomorrow. Keith wouldn't care. He might just tease her a little for being such a scaredy cat. Which was rich coming from him, but she could handle it. Teddi didn't bother to pretend to be calm. She rushed around the prize counter, stashing the broom and dustpan aside and grabbed for her keys so she could open unlock the break room door. There was a knock at the front door. Teddi screamed.

She whirled around, her hand on her chest to try and steady her heart, and glared at the front door. Billy Hargrove was on the other side, grinning wildly. Teddi and Billy had been best friends since they met in swim class at the Hawkins public pool when they were six. They were the best swimmers in the class and Billy thought Teddi was cool because she was the only kid in class aside from himself that wasn't afraid to jump off the high diving board. After that they were pretty much attached at the hip.

Billy had been Teddi's first...*everything*. Her first kiss. The first guy she

had sex with. Her first love. They had hit puberty and the pair basically used each other a trial run for everything and anything. "What, I'm gonna humiliate myself in front of Cheryl Burns because I'm shit at kissing? I don't care if I humiliate myself in front of you." Billy had said before they'd shared their first kiss. Romantic, right? Now Teddi was trapped in this friends with benefits sort of situation with a guy she was way, way too afraid to confess her real feelings to.

Teddi rolled her eyes at Billy. She stomped over, unlocking the door and swinging it open. "A little jumpy are we?" he asked with a laugh before strolling inside. Teddi locked the door behind him and glared at her friend. Billy shoved his hands into the pockets of his denim jacket and leaned up against Dragon's Lair. He watched her with an amused expression. "What are you so freaked out about, Larsson?"

Teddi ignored the question and walked past him, heading once again for the break room. Billy followed after her. "What are you doing here?" she asked. She unlocked the door and Billy held it open for her while she grabbed her bag out of her locker.

"I came to give you a ride home." he shrugged.

Teddi shot him a look. "Uh huh. That's sweet, but I drove myself," she said, pointing outside to her van. Billy's Camaro was parked next to it. She couldn't believe that she had been so freaked out by the power going out that she hadn't heard the engine when he pulled in. She eyed the Camaro and noticed that it was empty. "Where's Max?"

Billy rolled his eyes. "Off with her dork friends playing their dork games," he said with a short laugh. "She rode her bike over to the Wheeler's." usually Max and her friends spent Sundays over at Mike Wheeler's playing Dungeons and Dragons. Teddi babysat for the Wheelers pretty often and usually found herself playing through a campaign with them. It was why they all preferred her to babysit over Billy. And she never let him forget that.

"Did you notice anything weird on your way here?" she tried to sound as casual as possible. But of course Billy could see right through it. He fell into step beside her, the pair making their way through the arcade as Teddi shut everything off for the night. Teddi felt the

goosebumps returning once they were out in the parking lot. She told herself it was just the cold air.

Billy smirked over at her, swinging his keys around his finger. "You gettin' paranoid on me again, Teddi Bear?" he asked. He blamed her wild imagination for all of the times she'd get like this. She read so many of those fantasy books, watched too many movies with monsters, and read too many comics. Her brain was always coming up with the wildest and worst scenarios.

Teddi let out a soft huff. "I just have a bad feeling."

Billy raised an eyebrow. "Heebie jeebies or the willies?" Teddi opened her mouth to scold him for teasing her, but he held his hands up to stop her. "Alright, alright. I'm done. Look, how 'bout I give you a ride home and we can come pick up your van tomorrow after school?" Teddi barely even thought it over. She hurried over to the passengers side of the Camaro and slid inside as soon as Billy unlocked it. Billy almost made a joke about how quickly she buckled her seatbelt and locked her own door, but decided against it.

They took off down the street in a comfortable silence. Well, it was for Billy. Teddi couldn't seem to sit still. Her leg was bouncing wildly and her fingers were drumming against her bare legs. Billy reached over and placed a hand on her knee. "Hey, he said lowly. "You okay?" Teddi didn't answer right away. Billy rolled down her window a little in hopes that the fresh air might help.

"I don't know.," she finally said with a loud, tired sigh. "I freaked myself out is all. I kept thinking about serial killers and then the power went out..." she laughed a little and shook her head. "It sounds really stupid when I say it out loud. I'll be fine." she waved his concern away. Billy didn't move his hand. As the Camaro blurred past the woods, the kids called it Mirkwood, Teddi heard a horrible screech coming from deep inside the forest. It didn't sound human. It didn't sound like anything Teddi had ever heard before. Horror movies included. The goosebumps were back.

Teddi looked over at Billy to confirm she hadn't been imagining things. Billy shifted uncomfortably. "...It's probably just an animal. Maybe a coyote got a deer or something." but he quickly rolled the

window up and flicked on the radio. They didn't hear the sound again. Billy soon pulled into Teddi's driveway and she let out a sigh of relief. The lights inside were off. Her parents cars were both in the driveway. *Thank god for small favors*, Teddi thought.

She realized they'd been sitting there for awhile and she hadn't moved yet. She unbuckled her seatbelt and smiled weakly over at Billy. She felt embarrassed about being so freaked out. "...Thanks for the ride." she said finally.

Billy smirked over at her, and she knew he was holding in some dirty comment. "No problem...you know, if you want I can always come in with you. Make sure there aren't any monsters in your room..." The way he was looking at her, casually stretched out in the driver's seat with that dangerous glint in his eyes almost made Teddi want to take him up on his offer. She could probably use the company, and fooling around with Billy for a few hours wouldn't be the worst thing.

Instead she scrunched up her nose and shook her head. "It's a school night, perv." she teased.

Billy groaned and sunk in his seat. "Fiiine. I'll see you tomorrow, Good Girl." he sighed. Teddi was grateful it was dark and that he couldn't see how flushed her cheeks probably were. She mumbled a goodnight and quickly went inside. Once the door was shut behind her she heard the rumble of the Camaro's engine as Billy pulled out of the driveway.

Teddi crept downstairs to her room. Her parents had turned the basement into a bedroom for her when they'd moved in over ten years ago. The house had four bedrooms total, but her mother had claimed two of them to be turned into a giant closet/dressing room and her father had claimed the third for an upstairs study. She had been more than fine with it. It was an excuse to stay away from them and she had her own bathroom. Plus, eventually she would learn that it made sneaking out a little too easy.

She made quick work of taking off her makeup and changing into her pajamas. It was a little childish, but when she flicked her bathroom light off she rushed across the room and dove into bed like she had when she was little. Like if she didn't hurry and get into bed some

monster would crawl out from under the bed and grab her ankles. Teddi pulled the blankets up to her neck and immediately regretted turning Billy down. She thought of that horrible screech she heard in the woods. Her mind started trying to imagine what sort of creature that the sound belonged to.

Teddi groaned. If she kept this up she would never get any sleep. "It's just a coyote," Teddi told herself, repeating Billy's words. "You're freaking out over nothing." and of course she was. This was Hawkins, Indiana she was talking about. There wasn't anything going bump in the night. No monsters. She thought of her father who was sound asleep upstairs and Neil Hargrove. Well, maybe that wasn't true.

Eventually she fell asleep peacefully, dreaming of her father and Neil trapped out in the woods with whatever creature had made that horrible noise.

"Wittle Stevie boy is in *wooooooove*," Carol taunted as she and Tommy H practically cackled. They'd been at this for the entirety of lunch. Steve had already ditched them once that morning to go meet Nancy in the girl's bathroom and the two *hyenas* wouldn't let it go. Steve, Teddi and Billy were all annoyed. They'd gotten a good laugh at first. They always did whenever they'd rag on each other. But Tommy and Carol definitely didn't know when to quit. "Steve and Nancy, sittin' in a tree!"

Billy rolled his eyes, blowing out a cloud of smoke before handing his cigarette over to Teddi. They were both leaned up against the side of the Camaro as they tried their best to ignore the peanut gallery.

"Come on, Steve. We're all friends here. You can tell us. What the hell do you see in that prude? 'Cause you can't tell me she's putting out." Tommy said, throwing his arm around Carol's shoulders.

Billy can't help but chuckle at that, smirking over at Steve. "Oh, I can probably think of a reason he's so interested." Teddi let out a scoff, handing the smoke back over to Billy. Steve's lips twitched into a grin and he rolled his eyes playfully at his best friend.

Teddi hated the way they talked about Nancy. She didn't really know which was worse; when they talked shit about her behind her back,

or when they teased and tormented her to her face. She guessed it was a good thing that Nancy never let it get to her no matter what they came up with. Ignoring Tommy and Carol was definitely the best way to deal with them. Teddi and Nancy weren't really friends per say. She knew her through school and from babysitting Mike. But she was always nice to Teddi. And she liked to think if the roles were reversed Nancy would stick up for her.

"Leave him alone guys," Teddi said, pretending to sound stern. "Maybe Steve just wants to date someone nice for once." she offered.

"*Thank you*, Teddi. She's very nice." Steve smiled, his mind clearly drifting to thoughts of Nancy. Teddi thought it was sweet. She briefly wondered if Billy ever looked that way when he spoke about her. *Not likely*, she thought with a sigh.

Carol let out a loud snort and she and Tommy fell back into a fit of laughter. "Nice?" she asked. "Steve doesn't like nice. He likes *easy*. And Nancy wheeler is the complete opposite of easy." it was to the point where Steve wasn't able to find the humor in the situation anymore. It wasn't often that Teddi saw Steve truly annoyed, but she did notice that Tommy and Carol were usually the reason for it happening.

"Maybe he's looking for a challenge this time," Tommy offered. "Maybe he's getting bored, eh, Steve?" he snickered.

Steve rolled his eyes. "Whatever, Tommy. I'll see you guys later." Teddi offered an apologetic smile while Billy lifted his hand in a short wave.

"Gotta go find Nancy?" Tommy asked. Carol started making kissing noises. "See ya later, Lover Boy! Give her a kiss for me!" he called after Steve. Steve threw a middle finger over his shoulder, the pair only laughing louder.

Teddi felt like she had a headache coming on. She almost wished she could find some sort of excuse to get Billy away from them and enjoy what was left of their lunch in peace. Tommy and Carol were joking around with each other now, so thankfully it was easier for her to tune them out. She let out a slow breath of smoke as she surveyed the

parking lot around them. She could see the middle school from where she was. She and Billy usually waited there for Max after school whenever she needed a ride home.

There were two cop cars parked out in the front of the school. A patrol car and Chief Hopper's Blazer. That paranoid feeling from the night before was back. She nudged Billy's side with her elbow and nodded over to the other school. "Cops." was all she said.

Billy didn't say anything. But she could see the flash of worry in his eyes. Tommy quickly broke the silence. "Whoa! What do ya think happened?" he and Carol moved closer to the fence that separated the two parking lots.

It couldn't have been anything *too* bad. There hadn't been any news travelling the halls at school. Nothing on the morning announcements. Maybe some kids just got into a fight or something and the cops were there to scare them straight.

"You know, Johnathan Byers wasn't here today," Tommy said with a nearly evil looking grin. "Maybe he finally snapped and offed his whole family. Hop's here to break the news to the principle." Teddi felt a chill up her spine at the way Tommy and Carol laughed at the suggestion.

Teddi knew that there wasn't a chance of that happening. Johnathan was a good guy. Just quiet. Still, this whole thing was starting to make the goosebumps come back.

"Tommy, will you shut the fuck up?" Billy asked in a tired tone. "Do you gotta be so fuckin' morbid all of the time?" he glared over at his friend. Tommy only grinned and shrugged. Teddi stepped on what was left of the cigarette and excused herself. She didn't give Billy time to say anything or follow after her. It was like that for the rest of the day. Teddi hid within herself and wondered why the cops were over at the middle school. And why Johnathan was absent.

When it was time for Billy to give her a ride back to the arcade, he decided to try and ease her worries. "Hey, Max. We saw Hopper was over at your school. What happened? Henderson finally take my suggestion and kick those little assholes in the balls?"

Max had been uncharacteristically quiet since getting into the Camaro. It definitely didn't make Billy feel any better. She shifted around in the backseat, her eyes trained down at her shoes. Teddi frowned and turned to face her. "Max? Is everything okay?"

"...Will didn't come home last night. His mom said he never made it back from Mike's. They can't find him anywhere." an almost sickening silence filled the car. Teddi felt her stomach drop. She thought she might get sick. She turned back in her seat, staring hard down at the dashboard.

Billy's eyes flickered between the two girls. His fingers tightened around the steering wheel. He almost wanted to blame Tommy for making that stupid joke at lunch. Like somehow it was his fault that Teddi and Max were so upset. "...It's only been a few hours," he finally said. "Maybe...maybe he tried to take a short cut and he got lost. They'll find him. No problem." he didn't really believe that. That sort of thing never happened except for maybe in those stupid lifetime movies that Susan liked to watch. He felt a wave of nausea roll over him as he imagined what might have happened to the Byers kid.

The girls were silent for the rest of the ride to the arcade. Billy noticed that Max was trying to hide the fact that she was crying. He didn't say anything. Teddi face had nearly turned white. She was just staring straight out at the road. She barely blinked. He knew that on some level she had probably found a way to blame herself. That bad feeling she had last night had been a sign and she had ignored it. Like somehow she was supposed to just know that Will Byers had been in trouble. Just like the night before, Billy reached over and placed his hand on her knee. She didn't move.

When they made it to the Palace Arcade's parking lot, Teddi wordlessly got out of the Camaro. "I'll be back, Max," Billy muttered, following Teddi over to the driver's side of her van. "Hey, hey. Are you okay?" he took her by the elbow and turned her to face him. "You're freaking me out, Larsson."

Teddi looked up at Billy's nervous expression. She smiled a little. "Are you saying you're worried about me, Billy?"

Billy let out a relieved breath through his nose and grinned down at her. "...If I say yes does that mean you'll let me come over tonight?" he wasn't very good at this. Talking. Comforting. More often than not he just ended up hitting on her and hoping for the best.

Teddi was quiet for a moment, and Billy was almost worried that he had upset her. "...Come over at ten. My parents will be asleep by then. Just park down the street so they don't see your car, okay?" Billy nodded.

He watched Teddi drive off before getting back in the Camaro. Max crawled into the front seat and roughly rubbed at her eyes with the sleeves of her hoodie. Billy didn't look directly at her. He drummed his fingers nervously against the steering wheel. "...You wanna get ice cream or something?"

Max nodded, smiling a little. "Ice cream sounds good."

2. Chapter Two: ShotGun!

A/N: When I was editing this I was watching friends, and it was an episode with Teri Garr who plays Pheobe's mom, and Phoebe has a friend that calls her Weird Girl. So that was a fun full circle moment. Also this chapter is kinda long...I'm thinking they probably all are gonna be on the longer side since I'm writing a chapter per episode. Enjoy!

xxx

The Larssons lived three doors down from the Harringtons in what Billy liked to call the Yuppie side of Hawkins. They were neighbors with the mayor and this stuffy news reporter named Chet Baker that was on TV. Steve also lived across the street from the edge of Mirkwood. If you hiked or rode your bike it was a straight shot from Steve's to the Byers' house. So naturally it was the first place that the cops had the search party look.

Keith had closed the arcade early for the night. As a sort of sign of respect for Will. Teddi didn't really think too many folks would let their kids out after dark anyways. She was thankful for the night off in any case. She was way too worked up worrying about Will. Billy was probably right. He'd just gotten lost and Hopper would eventually find him. If she said it enough times to herself she would almost start to believe it.

Her parents had gone to bed about an hour ago. Teddi thought it was pretty funny how they both seemed to act so concerned about Will, but neither of them had batted an eye at the idea of joining the search party. Teddi guessed it was impressive enough that they even bothered to flip on the news to check for updates.

Now she was in bed, watching music videos on MTV and waiting for Billy to show up. It was 10:20 now and she was starting to get that pit in her stomach again, worrying that something had happened to him. The two of them had been sneaking out of the house since they were about twelve. They'd gotten caught a few times in the beginning. After they'd gotten a few "talking tos" from their dads they had learned from their mistakes. Now they could probably do it tied

up and blindfolded. But then again, Will had taken the shortcut through Mirkwood so many times that he could do it tied up and blindfolded and look what had happened to him. Maybe Neil had caught Billy sneaking out. Teddi let out a shaky breath.

There was a knock at her window. Teddi's head jerked at the sound, letting out a sigh of relief when she saw Billy crouched outside waiting for her. She hurried over and unlocked the latch. She didn't usually lock it. Usually Billy could just give the window a small shove and slip in on his own. But the last two days had left her paranoid. It was a small window. If Billy had been any bigger he wouldn't have been able to fit through. He slid in feet first and landed inside Teddi's room with a soft thud. She shut the window and locked the latch back after him.

"Sorry I'm late. Hopper put out a curfew for minors. I had to take the long way around to avoid the damn search party," he apologized. Teddi plopped down on her bed and Billy watched her carefully. She was chewing at her bottom lip. "You doin' okay?" he asked.

"Has Max heard anything about Will yet?" she pulled her knees to her chest, wrapping her arms around herself.

Billy shook his head. He kicked off his boots and tossed his denim jacket onto a bright green, fuzzy bean bag chair that sat nearby. He sat next to Teddi, leaning back on his elbows and training his eyes on the TV. "Not yet. I'm pretty sure she thinks I didn't see, but she was sneaking out of her window when I was leaving to come here. I guess her and the geek squad are gonna go out lookin' for Byers."

Teddi looked over at him with wide eyes. "What? What do you mean she snuck out? Shouldn't we go with them? I mean, what if something happens to them?" not to mention there was the chance they could run into the search party, and Teddi knew Neil would be *pissed* if Hopper showed up at his doorstep with Max in tow.

Billy only looked over at her with an amused look. "Ted, nothing's gonna happen to them. I mean, who would kidnap them? They're way too annoying." he joked.

Teddi sighed. "That's so not funny...do you think we should tell

someone? About that noise we heard last night? Maybe we should go down to the station tomorrow and tell Hopper about it. Maybe it'll help." she couldn't really imagine that it would do much of anything to tell the chief that they had heard some inhuman screech coming from the woods, but it couldn't *hurt*, right?

Billy waved her off. "You just wanna go down there 'cause you have a thing for Hopper." he teased. Teddi rolled her eyes and fell back onto her bed with a groan. Since Jim Hopper had moved back to Hawkins about five years before, he had taken a liking to Teddi. Billy too, but that was neither here nor there. Teddi had made a joke in passing that she wished Hopper would adopt her and Billy had never let it go. He'd always been that way though. Jealous.

Billy rolled over onto his side to look at her. Her hands were folded over her stomach and her eyes were trained on the ceiling fan. Billy's hand wrapped around one of hers. "How come you're letting this freak you out so bad?" he asked quietly.

Teddi was chewing on her lip again. "I don't know...I guess it's cause I know Will so well. I babysit for him. He's always at the arcade. Him and his mom always bake me cookies for my birthday..." she swallowed loudly. "He's a sweet kid. He doesn't deserve anything bad happening to him." Billy's hand squeeze hers a little tighter as tears prickled her eyes. She knew that Billy already assumed the worst. It was in his nature to. But still, he lied and told her everything was gonna be fine. She appreciated it.

The two of them laid there quietly, the only noise in the room was the Pat Benatar video playing on TV, when it started raining. There was a bright flash of lightning followed by a clap of thunder so loud it nearly shook the house. Teddi covered her eyes. "God, could this night get any creepier?" she asked with a small laugh.

Billy looked over at her with a mischievous glint in his eyes. "You saying you're scared of a little thunder, Teddi?"

"No I'm not scared of thunder." she said firmly. She was. She had hated thunderstorms since she was little. But she wasn't about to admit that out loud.

Billy only smiled. He hooked an arm around Teddi's middle, lifting her with ease and tossing her further up the bed. She let out a small squeak before glaring down at Billy who was crawling up the bed beside her. His hand slid slowly across her stomach, his fingers slipping beneath her t-shirt and leaving goosebumps in their wake. "You sure?" he asked with a grin.

Teddi turned to look at him with a playful eye roll. "*Positive*." Billy kissed her then. Teddi's fingers grabbed at Billy's shirt as their lips moved in sync, almost like she was afraid he would be ripped away from her at any moment. Billy's hand snaked around Teddi's waist and pulled her flush against him, his lips moving from Teddi's, down her jaw and neck before finding a home at the base of her neck. There was another loud clap of thunder. Teddi jumped.

Billy pulled away with a groan. Teddi gave him a sheepish grin and he hopped up from the bed. "Alright, Larsson, I've had about enough of this," he reached into the front pocket of his jeans and pulled out a joint, holding it up with a wicked grin. "And don't even think about telling me it's a school night. We can put on one of your weird movies you like. Whatever'll get you to stop panicking." she and Billy didn't really get stoned all that often. Just at the occasional party. But maybe Billy was right. Maybe it would help her calm down.

They decided on *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. Billy was fine with the choice. Teri Garr was pretty hot in the same funny, quirky way Teddi was. It was how Teddi always got him to watch *Young Frankenstein*, as much as he hated those slapstick comedies. Teddi snuck them two beers out of her dad's stash. He had a fridge full out in the garage and if she took cans from the back he would never notice. They both crawled into bed, Teddi nestling against Billy's side and settled in for the movie. The joint had done its job. A little too well. They barely made it halfway through the movie before the pair drifted off to sleep. Teddi didn't dream that night.

They didn't wake up until Teddi's alarm went off the next morning. "Shit..." Billy groaned, rubbing at his eyes. "I gotta call Susan and tell her I can't take Max to school." Teddi smacked her lips together gently a few times to try to get rid of the dryness in her mouth and buried her face into his neck. She didn't want to go to school. She didn't want to go back to the real world where kids were going

missing. She wanted to stay in her bedroom with Billy and argue about whether Richard Dreyfuss' voice was annoying or not.

But that couldn't happen. She knew that it couldn't. She also knew that if either of her parents caught Billy in her bedroom they would be in *big* trouble. So Teddi pulled herself out of bed and shuffled over to her window. Her parents cars were gone. Her dad had gone off to work and her mom was probably off with Steve's mom for their aerobics class and brunch. She probably wouldn't be back for an hour or two.

This definitely wasn't the first time Billy had slept over. Teddi had slept over at the Hargrove's plenty of times. Never on a school night. Susan was always up early to make Neil his breakfast and there would be no way for Teddi to sneak back out unseen. But they had done this enough times to have their own routine.

Teddi changed out of her pjs and into a pair of shorts and a black knitted sweater. She dug through her drawers until she found a Metallica shirt that she was pretty sure she had stolen from Billy and threw it to him to change into. She kicked on her boots and they made their way up to the kitchen. Billy called Susan. "Yeah, hey Susan...no, I'm fine," he rolled his eyes. Teddi snickered and dropped four eggos into the toaster. "I had to leave early. I had uh...a basketball thing...yeah...what do you mean she left?...Oh. Yeah, yeah I'll make sure she gets home. Later, Susan."

Teddi raised an eyebrow as she smeared strawberry jam on the eggos, making two sandwiches. "Everything okay?" she asked.

"The little shitbird left early to go to Wheeler's," he mumbled. "Susan's all freaked out that she's on her own now that Byers' is missing."

"Well, I can't really blame her," she handed Billy an ego sandwich and a can of coke. "Breakfast of champions." she joked. On the drive to school they passed by another search party. *No luck yet then*, Teddi thought with a sigh. That pit in her stomach was starting to come back.

When they got to school Barb and Nancy were standing in the hall with Steve, Carol and Tommy. Steve was smiling a genuine smile at

Nancy. Tommy and Carol were smiling at her like they were in on some sort of secret she didn't know about. Like they were just waiting for her to walk away so they could start making fun of her. Barb was shifting nervously next to her best friend. Teddi was sure that Barb probably wished she could be absolutely anywhere else in the world. She kind of wanted to join her.

"...It's Tuesday." Nancy said to Steve with a short laugh.

Tommy snickered. "It's Tuesday!" he mocked before he and Carol fell into a fit of giggles. Teddi didn't know what it was that they were talking about, but she couldn't help but roll her eyes.

"Come on, dude," Steve gave a pathetic attempt at brushing Tommy off. "It'll be low key. It'll just be us," Steve looked up and saw Billy and Teddi approaching. "Perfect timing! We were just trying to convince these two to come over to my place for a party tonight. You guys in?"

Teddi didn't really want to go to a party on a school night, but she knew better than Nancy to bring it up in front of Tommy and Carol. "Uh...well, I have the night off at the arcade. I guess I can come over for a little." if it had been anyone else she would have said no. But she figured it would probably be safe to make the long trek three doors down the street to Steve's. Billy only shrugged and mumbled an "I'm in."

Steve turned back to Nancy with an expectant look. Before she could answer Carol pulled a face and turned to look at something behind Teddi and Billy. "Oh, *god*. Look." the group turned at once to see whatever it was Carol was talking about. Johnathan Byers was back at school. Teddi felt a wave of dread wash over her. Johnathan had always been an awkward guy. He was nice, but awkward. Now with the added grief it was like he could barely function. He clumsily weaved his way through a group of students, avoiding each of their looks, and headed for a bulletin board nearby.

He pinned up a poster. It had two pictures of Will. The top read "Have you seen me?" with a description of Will and the Byers' phone number listed below. "God, that's depressing..." Steve mumbled. Billy shifted uncomfortably at Teddi's side before throwing his arm around

her in a half attempt to comfort her.

"...Do you think we should say something?" Nancy asked nervously. Teddi almost wanted to laugh at the idea of Carol or Tommy offering any words of comfort to anyone. Even each other.

As if he wanted to prove Teddi's point, Tommy leaned forward and fixed a wicked look in Johnathan's direction. "How much you wanna bet he's the one that killed him?" Even Carol rolled her eyes at him. Steve gave him a hard shove and muttered a "shut up."

Nancy pretended not to hear his comment and made her way over to Johnathan. Billy looked at Tommy with a glare before giving him another hard shove. "You gotta stop saying shit like that, Tommy. It's not funny." he warned. It would probably only get Tommy to stop for a few hours. For some reason he had never quite caught on that *no one* found his sense of humor funny aside from Carol.

The bell rang and Nancy made her way back over to the group. Steve threw an arm around her before the two walked off with Barb down the hall. Carol watched as they walked away and shook her head. "I can't believe he's throwing this stupid party. It's totally just an excuse to get into Nancy's pants. Like it'll even work."

Teddi rolled her eyes. "Yeah, great plan. Try and bone her with Tommy outside the door trying to listen in." she was speaking from experience. She had nearly lost count of the times Tommy had "accidentally" walked in on her and Billy any time they had snuck off during a party.

Even though the comment wasn't really a joke, Tommy still laughed loudly. "You know it!"

Billy shot him another unimpressed look. "You're an idiot, Tommy. I gotta go. I gotta go lay the charm on Mrs. Murphy before she fails me in history and my dad shits a fit."

Carol let out a snort. "It'll totally work. It's probably the most action that old crone has seen in years," she leaned up to kiss Tommy before she linked her arm with Teddi's. "We're off to math. See ya later, boys." she wiggled her fingers at them and she and Teddi took off.

Teddi didn't really mind Carol when Tommy wasn't around. She was more likable. Not by much, but enough. Teddi just hoped that they would both somewhat behave themselves tonight at the party.

She doubted it.

xxx

Teddi's parents were watching the news when Teddi was getting ready to leave for Steve's party. Chet Baker, with his leathery tan and teeth that were a little too white, was smiling widely and looking a little too cheerful for the subject he was reporting on. But it wasn't about Will. Benny, a guy who owned a diner on the edge of town, had apparently killed himself. He'd shot himself right in the middle of his restaurant the night before and one of his friends had found him that morning. Teddi felt like she might be sick. What was happening in Hawkins?

When Chet moved on to the weather report for the night, Teddi cleared her throat. "Um...I gotta get to work. I'll see you guys later, okay?" her parents were of course unaware that she had the night off and that Keith had closed the arcade early because of the curfew, but it wasn't like they'd let her go to a party on a Tuesday night.

"Okay, hun." her mother called blandly over her shoulder.

Her dad turned and looked at her with a stern expression. "You make sure you're home immediately after your shift, Theodora. There's a curfew." she knew that he wasn't saying that because he *cared*. He was saying it because he didn't want to deal with the embarrassment of having Hopper bringing her home after catching her screwing around with her friends.

"Yes sir." she mumbled. Teddi quickly made her way out to her van. This was another ploy she had perfected. She'd drive the van down the street to the Harrington's, and Steve would be waiting with the garage door open so she could park it inside. Billy was already there. He was lounging out by the pool with a beer and smoking a cigarette.

Teddi plopped down at the foot of Billy's pool chair and caught the beer Steve tossed her. "Did you guys see the news?" she asked. The

two boys shot her similar, unimpressed looks. She rolled her eyes. It was a stupid question to ask. Of course they hadn't. "You know Benny? He shot himself last night in his diner," the both looked at her with blank expressions. "Don't you think that's *weird*? I mean, Will goes missing and then Benny of all people kills himself?"

Billy shrugged and blew out a large cloud of smoke. "It's not *that* weird. We live in bumfuck Indiana, Ted. It's a shitty place where shitty things happen."

Steve let out a chuckle. "You're really depressing. You know that, Hargrove?" Billy's lip only twitched in a quick grin. Steve stood up. "You know, Teddi, you seem pretty tense. And being that we're such good friends, and Billy here telling me that you've been a little on edge lately I thought I might do my favorite friend a little favor...no offense, Billy."

Billy flicked away his cigarette and let out a short laugh. "None taken."

Teddi raised an eyebrow. "Why do you sound like the beginning of a bad porno?" she asked with an amused smile.

Billy and Steve both laughed. Steve reached into his back pocket and held up a joint. "I thought the three of us could partake in a little pre-party favor before Carol and Tommy get here." he wiggled his eyebrows.

Teddi let out a laugh and laid back, settling herself between Billy's legs. He wrapped an arm around her stomach. "You two could always just *talk* to me about my feelings instead of drugging me whenever I'm bummed out, you know." she teased.

"Well, yeah...but this is more fun." Steve held up his hand and Billy tossed him his lighter. Steve lit the joint, taking a long drag and passing it over to Billy. He held the smoke in as long as he could before bursting into a coughing fit. Teddi could feel the laughter rumbling in Billy's chest behind her.

She liked it best when it was just the three of them. This was how things had been when they were kids. Before Tommy H and Carol

started hanging out with them in the sixth grade. Teddi and Steve's moms had thrown them together for playdates when they were kids because it was easier than actually *watching* their kids. Teddi invited both Billy and Steve to her 8th birthday party (an excuse for a social event for her mother) and the three had been inseparable since. There'd been a bit of a rough patch once Billy and Teddi started sleeping together. Steve kept calling himself a third wheel. But then he started getting attention from girls and it wasn't an issue anymore.

Eventually the doorbell rang. Steve shot up from his seat and started to fan away all of the smoke. "Shit, that's probably Carol and Tommy. Get rid of the evidence!" he rushed off into the house. Billy chuckled, taking one last hit before dropping what was left of the joint into his now empty beer can.

"You feel better yet?" he asked, resting his chin on the top of Teddi's head.

Teddi smiled lazily and nodded. "Mmhmm. I mean, it's about to be ruined in about thirty seconds, but yeah." as if on cue Carol laughed loudly inside and Billy let out a groan. Steve led them outside and Tommy announced that he had to start drinking so he could catch up with the three of them. He'd chugged down four cans in about two minutes and crushed each of them on his head. Carol watched on with an annoyed look as she nursed her first beer.

It wasn't long after that Nancy and Barb showed up. Teddi felt bad for Barb. She *clearly* didn't want to be there. A common theme whenever Barb had to be around their friend group. Teddi tried to make as much small talk with her as she could as a very happy and very stoned Steve tried his best to show off for Nancy. He was talking her into shotgunning a beer when Teddi noticed that there was something off in the bushes beyond the pool.

She couldn't make out what it was. It was just a dark, sort of human like shape. There was no way it was a deer, or a coyote. The music and the gang's laughter would scare away any animal. Was it a person watching them? Maybe some creep from the search party? She softly elbowed Billy's chest. "Do you see that?" she asked quietly.

Billy lazily turned his head, squinting a little too hard at whatever it

was that Teddi claimed to have seen. She decided it was time to cut him off from any more drinking. "...What am I lookin' at, Larsson?" he asked finally.

"There's...*something* over there. I think. I heard the bushes rustling around and then I saw something move." whatever it was she couldn't spot it now.

"You're workin' yourself up again, Teddi Bear," he grumbled. Teddi opened her mouth to argue, but she was distracted by Barb letting out a loud hiss. She'd cut her hand pretty badly. Steve showed her back inside to find the bathroom. Billy only looked bored with the situation. He sat up, bringing Teddi up with him. "That's my cue to leave. You wanna come with me to pick up Max?" Teddi didn't hesitate to nod. She could just call Steve the next morning and come pick up her van. "Yo, Harrington! We're gonna head out. I gotta pick up Max."

Tommy let out a loud scoff. "The party's just gettin' started! You've barely had anything to drink, Teddi! Come on, shotgun a beer with us!"

Teddi gave him a thin smile. "I'm good. I'm kinda not feeling so great anyways." she lied.

Carol grinned. "Maybe Billy knocked you up." she teased. Teddi and Billy both rolled their eyes.

"Well, alright then party poopers. Guess we'll just have to have fun without you!" Tommy cried, picking Carol up and tossing her into the pool before joining her. Teddi laughed and shook her head, saying her goodbyes to Nany and Steve. She told Nancy to tell Barb bye for her before she followed Billy out to the Camaro.

He shoved the key into the ignition and shot her a concerned look. "I'm *fine*," Teddi assured him. "It's probably just the pot. I'm all good. I promise." that was enough for him. He started the car and they were off, speeding towards the Wheeler's.

Mrs. Wheeler answered the door. Billy flirted with her. He always did. Teddi tried not to look as annoyed as she felt. "The kids are in

the basement," she pointed towards the door. "They must be up to something important, I haven't heard a peep from them for the last two hours." Billy and Teddi knew that that meant there was a good chance that the basement was actually empty. Teddi hoped Max wouldn't be reckless enough to make her and Billy miss their curfew.

The pair made their way downstairs. "Max, let's go! Susan wants you home by...nine..." Billy trailed off as he took in the scene before him. Teddi froze. The kids were in the basement. They were crowded around the makeshift table they played Dungeons and Dragons on.

There were five kids standing around the board. And the fifth wasn't Will Byers. It was a girl. One that Teddi and Billy didn't recognize.

Billy looked over the group a few times before resting his hands on his hips. Something he always did when he was annoyed. "...Explain. *Now.*"

3. Chapter Three: Phone Home

A/N: Boy this is a long one. Billy has also become like the surprise comic relief in this fic and I sort of love it. Hope you enjoy!

xxx

Billy and Teddi both stood at the foot of the stairs of the Wheeler's basement, arms crossed and looking sternly at the four kids that had formed a wall to shield the new girl. Teddi noticed how scared she looked. She was tiny. She almost reminded Teddi of a little stray kitten. Her intimidating demeanor nearly faltered a few times because she wanted to give the poor thing a hug.

Mike held up his hands as if he was trying to keep Billy under control. Like that was even possible. "You have to promise that you won't freak out before I explain anything. *Both of you.*" the thing about Mike was that he had never really learned the right way to talk to Billy (or vice versa). Teddi and Mike would butt heads pretty often, Max said it was because they could be so similar. But Mike and Billy could be a dangerous combination. Teddi was positive because relationships between a Sagittarius and a Cancer could be pretty volatile, but they both hated when she brought up her horoscope stuff. At least they could agree on that, she guessed.

So all things considering, Billy was handling this situation really well. He glared down at Mike. "And why would we freak out?" he asked with a raised eyebrow. "What the hell have you losers gotten yourselves into now?" there was a long pause as the group looked at each other, trying to decide who would be the one to explain. "*I'm waiting.*" Billy snapped.

Max let out a heavy sigh and stepped forwards. "We were out in Mirkwood, looking for Will," she began. "She was out in the rain, so we brought her here. She knows something about what happened to Will. That's why we haven't told anyone. We *can't*. There are bad men after her." Billy and Teddi shared a look before Teddi turned back to Max.

"What do you mean by bad men?" she asked nervously.

The girl shook her head slowly before raising her fingers to the side of her head, mimicking a gun. "Bad men." was all she said.

Billy let out a humorless chuckle and pinched the bridge of his nose. "Jesus Christ..." he muttered.

Teddi looked over at him pointedly. "Now do you believe me that something weird is going on?" she almost wondered if maybe this was a prank. Like the kids had gotten some girl from school to come and pretend to be some sort of runaway to freak them out. And while the kids liked to pull the occasional prank on Billy and Teddi, she knew that now wasn't the time for that sort of thing.

"Are you guys insane?" Billy asked through his teeth. "You can't harbour some runaway kid in your basement. Especially with Byers missing. You're gonna get caught and then we're *all* gonna be in deep shit."

Mike rolled his eyes. "Chill out, would you? We have this under control. The only reason anyone's gonna find out is if *you* can't keep your mouth shut." he spat up at Billy. Teddi let out a tired sigh as the two started bickering. She couldn't really make out what they were saying. Just that Billy kept jabbing his finger in Mike's direction and Mike standing on his toes to make himself as tall as possible as he shouted back at Billy.

Teddi moved past the group and over to the girl, who was watching the two boys argue with wide eyes. She knelt down in front of her, smiling softly. "Hi. Um, my name's Teddi. What's your name?" she didn't say anything. Teddi couldn't really blame her. To be lost in the woods and then suddenly finding yourself in Mike Wheeler's basement while he was screaming about government agents coming to kill him had to be a lot to take in. It was almost too much for even Teddi to handle.

"Her name's Eleven," it was Dustin. "She doesn't really talk much," he explained with a shrug. "We've been calling her El."

"Eleven?" Billy asked with a scoff. "How the hell can her name be Eleven? That's a number, not a name," El remained silent. She held up her arm, pulling her sleeve up to show **011** tattooed in thick black

ink on her wrist. Teddi felt her stomach drop. "*Jesus Christ*," he repeated. "You little shits are really in it this time."

"This is just like ET," Teddi found herself saying. Billy and the kids all turned to look at her. "What? Elliot finds ET in the woods and hides him in his house from his mom and the government. This is totally ET."

"You can't call her that," Mike argued. "That's totally offensive! She's not an alien."

"It's not offensive! It's like one of the best movies ever made!"

"Can you two stop arguing about your nerd shit for two goddamn seconds? We have a feral preteen in the basement!" Billy spat. Mike and Teddi shared one last glare before Teddi turned back to El. She was sure that Mike and the gang were taking care of her. As much as four twelve year olds could. But Teddi felt like she needed to find somewhere safe for El to go. She just didn't know where that was.

"...Should we tell someone? Maybe we *should* call Hopper, Billy. We can tell him about that screech out in the woods. And I'm sure he'd know what to do about El. We can trust him, can't we?"

Billy didn't get a chance to respond, Lucas looked at Teddi with a frown. "Wait, wait. What do you mean that screech out in the woods?"

Teddi didn't say anything right away. She chewed on her lip and looked over at Billy. He looked put out by this conversation. She almost wondered if he thought there was a chance he was dreaming. Like maybe he had passed out at Steve's and this was all pretend. His eyes met Teddi's, and he gave her a nod as if to say it was okay to tell them.

"The night that Will went missing," Teddi began. "All of this weird stuff happened. Like the power went out at the arcade. And the radio cut out. But it was all at once. Like all of Hawkins went completely dead for a few seconds. And then when Billy was giving me a ride home we heard this...*noise* out in Mirkwood. It was like a scream but worse. It didn't sound human or like an animal."

The group gave each other a knowing look. "The Demogorgon." Dustin said quietly, his eyes wide.

Billy's face screwed up into a pissed off, confused expression. "The hell is a Demogorgon?"

The kids and Teddi rolled their eyes at him. "It's a monster from Dungeons and Dragons," she explained. She turned to the kids. "What do you *mean* it was the Demogorgon? How is that even possible? It's a *game*."

Lucas moved over to the table El was sitting at and flipped their game board over. He picked up a small, metal monster. The Demogorgon. "This is what took Will," Teddi knew that she was looking at him like he was speaking another language. "It's out there in Mirkwood. El says that it took Will, but he's *alive*. He's hiding from it. She's gonna show us where he's hiding tomorrow." the hopeful looks on each of their faces made Teddi's heart hurt. It wasn't that she didn't believe them. If anyone in town was going to believe them it would be her. But the idea of a monster from a board game coming to life and essentially kidnapping Will was almost too crazy for even Teddi to believe.

"No." Billy said behind her. "*No way*. You guys aren't going out into the woods with some...*science experiment* to look for Byers." he crossed his arms firmly across his chest. The kids collectively groaned.

"Billy, come on..." Max pleaded.

"I said *no*, Max. There's no fucking way I'm letting you out there with whatever the hell it is that killed Will!"

"*He's not dead!*" Mike argued.

"Well I don't see him around anywhere!" Billy's voice had taken on a cold tone. "Do you? Do any of you?" the kids wouldn't meet his gaze. Teddi turned and placed a hand on Billy's chest, gently pushing him away from Mike.

"Billy..." she said gently. He was breathing heavily. His jaw clenched

tight. Billy looked down at Teddi and let out a shaky breath through his nose. "Maybe...maybe we *should* go. You know they're gonna go on their own regardless. At least if we're there we can make sure nothing happens to them, right? And who knows? Maybe El can actually help. It wouldn't be the strangest thing to happen around here lately." she reasoned.

There was a tense silence that filled the room. The kids were all still and watching Billy, like they were afraid he might snap again if any of them moved. Billy looked at each of them for what felt like forever before he swallowed thickly and pointed a finger in their direction. "We'll pick you up tomorrow after school in Teddi's van. If *any* of you leave without us, you're dead. You hear me?"

They all nodded at once. Billy rubbed roughly at his forehead and sighed. "Max, let's go. We're gonna be late." he turned and headed back upstairs without another word. Max muttered her goodbyes and followed after her brother.

"I'll be there in a second, Max," she called after the red head. Teddi cast a quick glance in El's direction. "Mike, are you sure this is a good idea? What if your mom finds her?"

Mike rolled his eyes. "Not possible. I could have El *and* ET down here and my mom wouldn't have any idea." Teddi believed him, but she was still nervous about leaving her.

She let out a shaky sigh. "Okay...but you have my number. Call me if anything happens, okay?"

Teddi couldn't stop thinking about El for the rest of the night. Not on the drive home. Not when Billy got out and walked her over to her window to help her sneak in. Not when he kissed her and said he'd see her tomorrow at school. And not when she finally crawled into bed.

Did she have anyone that cared about her? Parents? Family? Anyone at all? She didn't even know her own name. And who the hell would want to hurt a harmless little girl? This was all so...*much*. And to add in the fact that the kids were convinced that Will had been taken by the Demogorgon? How was something like that even possible? How

would El know that a monster had taken Will, much less where to find him when over half the town had been out looking for him?

That night Teddi dreamt of Will, El and the Demogorgon.

xxx

Teddi picked up Billy and Max the next morning on her way to school. Most of the drive was spent with Billy lecturing Max about how stupid her and her friends were for going out into Mirkwood alone. At one point Teddi had flicked on the radio on just to shut him up. The kids had enough on their hands. Max didn't need to add Billy's over protectiveness to it.

Now she was on her way to English. She hadn't seen any sign of Steve, Carol or Tommy yet and she wondered briefly if maybe they had all stayed home with the hangovers they no doubt had after the party.

"Teddi!" someone called from behind her. It was Nancy. She hurried down the crowded hall towards Teddi, her books hugged close to her chest. The nervous expression on her face didn't do much for Teddi's already shot nerves. "Hi, um have you seen Barb at all today?" she was trying to keep her voice as steady as possible, but Teddi definitely noticed how she could barely stand still.

"Oh, no I haven't yet...is everything okay?" she asked with a frown.

Nancy bit her bottom lip and looked up and down the hall as if she expected Barb to magically appear. She finally gave an attempt at a casual smile and shook her head. "Yeah! Yeah, it's fine. I'm having a weird day, I guess. Barb left the party early last night and I haven't heard from her."

Teddi felt a jolt of panic shoot through her chest. Will, Benny and now Barb? No. Barb was *fine*. There was no reason to think that anything bad had happened to her. And she especially couldn't let Nancy know that she had any concerns. "Well, it was cold last night you know? And then with her cutting her hand...maybe she just stayed home sick? I mean I nearly stayed home myself." she said with a small laugh that she hoped sounded convincing. It wasn't so much

for feeling sick reasons though. It was more for Mike Wheeler has a runaway in his basement reasons.

Nancy nodded and gave her a thin smile. "Right. Yeah, you're probably right. I'll call her after school. Thanks, Teddi. I'll see you later?" Teddi nodded and gave her a small wave and the two parted ways. Teddi spent her morning wondering if she, Billy and the kids would find Barb along with Will out in the woods. Her stomach wouldn't stop churning.

When lunch came around Billy was out in the parking lot, leaning against Teddi's van with a cigarette between his lips. Teddi opened the back doors, hopped up inside and let out a heavy groan. Billy only looked on with a raised eyebrow. "Nany can't find Barb." she huffed out.

"...Who the fuck's Barb?" Billy asked with a blink.

Teddi rolled her eyes and ran a hand through her hair. "Nancy's best friend? The red head that's always with her?"

"Oh, yeah. The lesbo...what about her?"

"She's not at school! Nancy said she left early last night and she hasn't heard from her since. What if something got her like it did Will?"

Billy flicked the rest of his cigarette away and hopped up into the back of the van next to her. He was giving her that amused grin he usually gave her when he thought she was being ridiculous. "Teddi, babe...you can't *actually* believe that there's some monster out in the woods." they looked at each other for a long moment, like Billy was waiting for her to laugh and admit that she was only kidding around with him.

That wasn't going to happen. He knew that it wouldn't. "Billy. Listen to me. I know that those kids have wild imaginations, okay? I know *I* have a wild imagination. But they don't *lie*. And they don't make things up," Teddi looked around to make sure that no one was listening to them before lowering her voice. "And now with Eleven showing up? I'm even more willing to believe them. I've played D&D with them more times than I can count. I know that they know the

difference between the real world and make believe."

Billy knew that Teddi knew those kids better than anyone in Hawkins. He knew that if he considered all of the facts that had piled up since Will went missing that he could admit that something *weird* was happening. But if he did that then he knew Teddi would only worry more. "...Whatever. I still don't think we're gonna find anything out there." he muttered.

Billy ended up convincing Teddi to skip her last period. He said it would do her some good to just *relax* instead of sitting in class worrying about monsters and calculus. She didn't really have the energy to argue. So they sat in the back of her van smoking and listening to music until the bell at the end of the day rang. They were headed over to the middle school when Tommy and Carol stopped them. "Have you seen Harrington anywhere?" Tommy asked.

"Not in a few hours, why?" Teddi asked. While Tommy and Carol had nearly permanent smirks on their faces, Teddi was surprised to see how annoyed the couple looked now.

Carol looked around to make sure none of the other students walking past them could hear their conversation. "Nicole said that she ran into Byers in their little geek den and said that she saw he had photos of us at Steve's last night." she sneered.

Teddi frowned. Had it been Johnathan that she had seen in the bushes? What in the hell was Johnathan Byers doing hiding in Steve Harrington's bushes? "What? No way. What was he even taking pictures of?"

"*Who cares?*" Tommy asked, crossing his arms firmly across his chest. "That freak thinks he can spy on us and get away with it? We're gonna go find Steve and meet Johnathan out by his car. There's no way he's getting away with this. You guys in?"

Billy looked like the idea intrigued him. But before he could agree, Teddi stepped in. "We can't. We have a thing. Call me and tell me what happened, okay Carol?" she didn't give her time to respond. She grabbed Billy by the arm and practically dragged him over to the middle school's parking lot. The last thing they needed was Billy,

Tommy and Steve getting into a fight with Johnathan and the four of them getting detention or even suspended.

"The hell is that little weirdo up to now?" Billy muttered. He angrily shoved his hands into the pockets of his jean jacket as he fell into step with Teddi. "His brother goes missing and he's spying on us? What the fuck's that about?"

"I have no idea. We so can't focus on that right now, okay? We have bigger issues. Do you see them anywhere?" she stood up on her toes to try and catch a glimpse of Max and her friends. Billy nudged her with his elbow and pointed. The kids were waiting at the school's entrance. Mike was looking at his watch and tapping his foot impatiently.

"Finally!" Mike said, throwing his hands up. "What the hell took you so long? We're supposed to meet El at 3:15! She's gonna get nervous if we're late!"

Lucas rolled his eyes. "Would you calm down? She'll be fine! You just can't wait to see your *girlfriend*."

Mike glared over at his best friend and Billy rolled his eyes. "Get in the van, shitbirds. You can argue on the way there. I have better things to do than drive you and baldy around the woods."

Max gave her brother an unimpressed look. "Better things to do? Like what? Go home and lift weights in the mirror?" Billy shot her a look while Teddi tried her hardest not to laugh. *Someone* had to act like they were on Billy's side.

Billy jabbed an angry finger at Teddi's van. "*Get in the van.*" he repeated. Max rolled her eyes dramatically and the kids followed dutifully. Teddi was helping each of them hop into the back when Steve came jogging over. Teddi stifled a groan.

"Wheeler, have you seen your sister anywhere?" Steve asked Mike, turning to scan the parking lot once more as if Nancy he'd suddenly be able to spot her.

Mike made a face. "How the hell should I know? Do I look like her

babysitter?"

Steve frowned. He looked slowly at Mike, Lucas, Dustin and Max before turning slowly to Teddi and Billy. To say he looked confused was an understatement. "...Why are you guys hanging out with a bunch of ten year olds?" he asked.

"We're *twelve*, asshole." Mike spat. Steve recoiled a bit from him, muttering out a "*jesus*" before looking at Teddi with wide eyes. Billy let out an annoyed grunt and picked Mike up, tossing him into the back of the van before harshly slamming the doors shut. He stood in front of them as if he were trying to keep the kids in and Steve out.

"We're babysitting," he said coolly. "Carol and Tommy are looking for you. Something about Byers being a pervert in your bushes." Steve only looked at Teddi as if he were asking if Billy was telling the truth. She smiled thinly at him and nodded.

"Right..." Steve said, looking between his two friends suspiciously. "Okay...I'll go find them then. I'll see you guys later..."

"Bye, Steve!" Teddi called quickly, rushing around to the driver's seat and hoping in. Billy climbed in with an irritated grunt and crossed his arms. Teddi turned and fixed a stern look on Mike. "You gotta stop cursing, Wheeler. You're *twelve*."

Mike only pointed an accusing finger in Billy's direction. "He curses all the time!"

"I'm a fucking adult, I can do what I want." Billy said firmly.

"You're *seventeen*," Teddi and Max reminded him. Billy only scoffed, reaching into the pocket of his jacket and pulling out his cigarettes. Teddi yanked the pack out of his hands and threw them up onto the dashboard. "No smoking around the preteens."

Billy glared back at Mike, his expression falling when he finally took him in. "Hey, what happened to your chin?" he asked, nodding at the large cut. Teddi whirled around in her seat with wide eyes.

Mike covered his chin quickly and shook his head. "What? Nothing."

"Are those little assholes still giving you guys shit?" Billy asked. The party remained silent, but it answered his question. Troy Walsh and James Dante had been terrorizing Mike and his friends ever since they started middle school. Both Billy and Teddi had offered to scare the little shits off for them on a few occasions, but the kids were too proud to take up the offer. "You guys need to start sticking up for yourselves. If you stick up to a bully, they'll know you're not scared of them and they'll leave you alone."

"What are we supposed to do?" Lucas asked. "Hold him down and kick him in the nuts?"

Billy only shrugged. Four pairs of eyes were now trained on Teddi as if asking for permission. She let out a heavy sigh. "...I'm not really one for violence, but Troy could probably use a good kick to the balls," she mumbled. With a small huff she grabbed Billy's cigarettes, rolled down his window and tossed the pack at him. "You can have *one*."

The pleased grin on Billy's face remained there for the entire drive to the Wheeler's, then when they picked up El, and didn't go away until Teddi parked at the edge of Mirkwood. "The first sign of any weird or dangerous *anything*, we're out of here. You hear me? And I don't want any of you out of my sight." Billy said sternly.

Dustin saluted him. "Yes sir."

"Don't call me that."

"...Sorry."

The kids piled out of the van, Billy and Teddi close behind. "Alright, go...sniff Will out or whatever it is you do," Billy said, waving a hand at El. Mike and Teddi shot him dirty looks. Eleven didn't really seem to understand the joke. She only turned and walked off alongside Mike. Billy looked over at Teddi and blinked. "What'd I say?"

"She's not a *dog*, Billy. She's a little girl." Teddi scolded.

"...You know, Max told me she can move things with her mind," he said with an amused grin. "I'll believe that when I see it."

Teddi only frowned, looking ahead of them to where El was. "...What do you think happened to her? Like, say she *can* move things with her mind. Or somehow magically track down Will. Where do you think she came from?"

"A school for kids with superpowers?" Billy offered with a laugh.

"You're so funny. Of course she's part of the X-men. Why didn't I think of that?" wherever it was that Eleven had come from, Teddi had a feeling it was a little more sinister than Xavier's school for gifted youngsters. "...What do you think is gonna happen once all of this is over? I mean, she can't live in Mike's basement forever."

"But I'm guessing she can live in your basement with you?" He asked.

"What? No. I wasn't thinki-"

"Of course you were. It's just who you are, Ted. But she won't be anymore safe with you. Not with your parents around," Teddi looked down at her boots and frowned. He was right. She knew he was right. "Look," he sighed. "When all of this is over...if we do actually manage to find Will, we can figure out what to do with the kid, okay? We can tell Hopper about her. He'll know what to do,"

He looked over at her, smirking and throwing an arm around her shoulders. "Come on, Teddi Bear. Turn that frown upside down," he teased. Teddi shot him an unamused look and gave him a playful shove. Billy let out a laugh and fell back into step next to her. There was a short, comfortable silence before he spoke up again. "...Seriously though, what do you think Byers was taking pictures of? Think he was perverting on Nancy?" he asked, wriggling his eyebrows. "Then again, the guy probably doesn't have it in him."

"I doubt he was perverting. He's not *you*," Teddi teased. "...I don't know what he could've been taking pictures of. Or why he was even out there," even if he had been out looking for Will, what could he have possibly seen in Steve's backyard? Maybe Billy was right. It was hard for her to imagine, but maybe Johnathan was just peeping at Nancy. It was obvious he had a thing for her. "...Maybe he was taking pictures of you." Teddi suggested, barely able to keep her laughter in.

Billy shot her a glare and shoved her back playfully. "Real fuckin' funny, Larsson." he muttered, cracking a smile at the sound of her laughter. The spent the next few hours like that, joking around with each other and the kids. Anything to try and lighten the mood. Eventually it started to get dark, and Billy tried to persuade the group to turn back.

"No! El says we're close. We can't go back now!" Mike said.

"Wheeler, your parents are gonna start freaking out if we don't get you home soon," Billy argued. "We'll just have to start up again tomorrow, okay?"

"We're not turning around!" Mike spat. Eleven took Mike by the wrist and pulled him along behind her as she broke into a jog. Teddi, Billy, Max, Lucas and Dustin were all quick to follow. There was a clearing up ahead that Eleven was headed towards. It was the Byers' house.

"Here." she said, coming to a stop. The group all looked at each other.

"Yeah, this is where Will lives..." Mike said unsurely.

"Hiding." Eleven clarified.

"No...no, this is where he lives," Mike argued. "He's *missing* from here, understand?"

Billy only looked over at Teddi with a raised eyebrow. "...How the hell did she know where Will lives?" he asked. Teddi shook her head. Maybe there really was something special about Eleven. She was much more willing to believe that she could move things with her mind.

Lucas let out an annoyed sigh from beside Billy. "What are we doing here?" he asked.

"She said that Will is hiding here," Max said in an annoyed tone. "El, how's that possible? I mean they definitely would've found him by now if he's hiding at his house."

"She's probably making it up!" Lucas argued with her. "That doesn't make sense! She had us out here walking around all day for nothing!"

I told you guys she doesn't know what the hell she's talking about! I'm with Billy and Teddi. We need to call the cops and tell them everything that's happened."

Teddi had moved around the boys and had an arm around Eleven. The girl was looking on helplessly as the boys argued. "Hiding," she repeated, looking up at Teddi.

"We're gonna find him, okay? You just gotta wait for the boys to stop...being boys."

Mike and Lucas had broken into an argument and Dustin was trying his best to intervene and calm his friends down. The three boys voices had risen, and it was nearly impossible to make out anything they were yelling at each other. "Hey!" Billy snapped. "Will you guys shut the hell up for a minute?" the three boys glared up at him. He only pointed out at the road. The sound of police sirens was getting closer and closer before a police cruiser and a fire truck went whizzing past them. "Not to state the obvious, but I don't think that's a good sign," Mike was off and running. Lucas and Dustin were close behind. "Goddammit, I said no one leaves my sight!" Billy boomed, following after them down the road.

Teddi looked down at Eleven and Max and let out a sigh. "See? *Boys*." the three girls followed after the group as fast as they could. They would never be able to keep up with the police cars or fire truck, but Teddi knew where the street would end. The quarry. Her heart was beating so fast she was worried that it might explode.

Hopper was there. He was standing at the edge of the water. While Teddi was relieved to see the chief, she knew that that couldn't be a good sign. Billy pulled the boys behind the fire truck as to not be seen by and of the adults. There were two men in the water, pulling something out along with them. A body.

"That's not Will. It can't be." Mike said quietly.

It was. There was no doubt that it was Will Byers being pulled out of the quarry. He was so *small*. Teddi couldn't get over how small he looked. Was this really it? This was how Will Byers died? It wasn't fair. He didn't deserve any of this. Teddi wanted to scream. She

wanted to cry. But she couldn't. Not in front of the kids.

"Mike..." Eleven said softly, reaching to touch his shoulder.

Mike whirled around and smacked her hand away. He glared at her. "*Mike? Mike what? You were supposed to help us find him alive! You said he was alive! Why did you lie to us? What's wrong with you? What is wrong with you?*"

Teddi stepped out in front of El. "Mike, stop it. This isn't her fault, okay? This isn't anyone's fault."

"Yeah, kid. Back off, huh?" Billy said lowly, warily eyeing Eleven. The poor girl looked scared to death. Mike scowled up at the both of them before turning and running off back up the road. "Mike! Come back here!" he yelled. It was no use.

Teddi wrapped her arm around Eleven again, pulling the girl close to her. "Just let him go...I think maybe we should all get out of here. I think it's time to get you guys home." her voice was coming out thick. She was doing everything she could not to cry. Dustin and Lucas couldn't seem to pull their eyes away from the quarry. Max was crying. She threw her arms around Billy, who somewhat awkwardly did his best to comfort her.

"Yeah," he agreed. "Yeah, we should go before the cops see that we're here." he said quietly. Eventually they got the four kids to head back to the van. It was a quiet ride home to say the least. Teddi felt like she couldn't get her bottom lip to stop trembling. The image of Will's body being pulled out of the water played over and over in her mind.

Maybe Billy was right. Maybe Hawkins was just a shitty place where shitty things were always happening. She just wished that Will hadn't fallen victim to it.

4. Chapter Four: Lifeguards On Duty

A/N: I guess I'm bumping the rating on this to mature now. I should throw out a disclaimer that I sort of hate writing smut so that's why it's so brief. We're also getting our first glimpse of papa bear Hopper. Trust and believe that if he could legally adopt Teddi and Billy he totally would. Hope you enjoy!

xxx

Once Teddi and Billy made sure that Dustin, Lucas and Eleven made it home safe, they headed back to Billy's place. The lights inside the living room were on. Probably Susan waiting up for Billy and Max to come home. Teddi parked her van a little ways down the street and hurried to the back side of the house to Billy's window. She rubbed at her arms roughly to try and warm herself up as she waited for him to let her in.

His light flicked on, and Billy quietly opened his window and helped pull Teddi inside. "Sorry," he muttered. "It's already on the news about Will. Susan had a million questions." Teddi pulled her puffy jacket off and plopped down onto Billy's bed.

"Is Max okay?" she asked quietly.

Billy sat next to her and wrapped his arm around her shoulders, pulling her close to his chest. "She's gonna be okay. It'll just take awhile. Susan's making her hot chocolate." he said with a small laugh. Like he thought it was funny that Susan seemed to think hot chocolate could fix the fact that Max's friend was dead.

Teddi's eyes burned. Her bottom lip was trembling again. She clasped a hand tightly over her mouth to try and quiet the sob that escaped her. Will was dead. He was gone. She would never see him again. And the last image she had of him was his body being pulled out of the quarry. She felt Billy place a kiss on the top of her head, and his hand rubbing slow circles on her back as she cried. Teddi knew that he hated it when people cried. He would always say that he never knew what to do. But he was better at comforting than he thought. All she needed was for him to sit there with her.

She cried for Will. And for Joyce and Johnathan. She cried for Mike, Lucas, Max and Dustin. Even El. Why did life have to be so unfair? Why did Will have to be taken so young? Why had Benny felt so alone that he had killed himself? Why did she, Billy and Max have to live in such terrible households?

Eventually her crying quieted. Teddi wiped roughly at her eyes and sniffed loudly. "...You want me to get Susan to make you some hot chocolate?" Billy asked lowly, a hint of teasing in his voice. Teddi let out a soft laugh and shook her head.

"I'm okay...god, I should probably head home."

"Stay," he said into her hair. "You shouldn't have to be alone tonight."

Teddi sniffed again and frowned up at him. "What about Neil and Susan? We'll get caught."

"Let me worry about it. We can skip school tomorrow. Go out to the lake or something." His hand moved from her shoulder to her waist, and he picked Teddi up with ease. She twisted around and settled onto his lap, straddling him. She idly played with the collar of his jean jacket as she considered his offer. Maybe Will's death had made her realize that life was short. Maybe this was a seize the moment type of thing. Maybe it was because she felt so vulnerable. Or maybe it was the way Billy was softly nipping at her neck, his fingers digging gently into her hips...

"I don't wanna do this anymore." Teddi said suddenly. Billy pulled away from her almost as if she had slapped him.

He blinked a few times. "...You don't want to do *what* anymore?" he asked carefully.

"This. Us," Billy only frowned and she shook her head. "I mean...god, what *do* I mean?" she asked herself, her hands grabbing onto his jacket tightly. "I don't want to see other people anymore. I want *you*. Us. I want you to take me out on a real date. Even if it's just to fool around at the drive in," she said with a soft laugh. "I mean, I..." why couldn't she just say the words? She felt it. She knew she did.

"...Are you saying you love me, Larsson?" he wasn't teasing her. He said it quietly, as if someone was trying to listen in on what they were saying.

Teddi let out a relieved sigh. The fact that Billy knew exactly what she was trying to say solidified her decision to speak her mind. It also gave her the boost of confidence she needed. "I love you." she repeated.

Billy smirked at her, pressing two fingers behind his ear and turning his head. "Sorry. I don't think I heard that. You mind repeating it?"

Teddi smiled, rolling her eyes and giving his shoulder a playful shove. "Shut up, *dick*." Billy chuckled, pulling Teddi to him and kissing her deeply. There was a small part of her that worried he wouldn't say it back. She sort of expected it. Billy had grown up with the idea that showing genuine affection made him look weak. And while he had made leaps and bounds in that area, he still had issues every now and then. He didn't have any trouble with *physical* affection, but the *emotional* affection was still a sore subject.

Billy's hand ran up and under the back of Teddi's shirt, his fingers drawing circles on her skin. She pulled away from him and took his face gently in her hands. "...And don't feel like you have to say it back, okay?" she added shyly.

Billy shook his head. He tucked a strand of Teddi's sandy blonde hair behind her ear. "But I do," he said. Teddi's heart was hammering so hard in her chest she was positive that he could probably feel it. There was a second where his guard went up again. He almost looked like he regretted saying it. But it was gone in a flash. He knew he was safe with Teddi.

That casual smirk was back. "Guess it's you and me 'till the end then, Larsson."

"'Till the end..." Teddi mused with a smirk of her own. "...I don't know. Not sure if I'll be able to stand you for that long." she teased. Billy scoffed and tossed Teddi off of his lap and back onto his bed.

He hovered over her, Teddi's hands finding a home on his biceps. "If I

have to put up with your mouth then you have to put up with me." he grumbled, kissing her again. "How 'bout I put that Kate Bush shit you like on and we consummate this thing?"

Teddi fell into a fit of giggles. She covered her mouth to quiet her laughter and nodded. "Took the words right out of my mouth." she teased.

Something about the way Billy touched her that night was different than usual. It was almost like he was afraid he might break her. Her own hands felt like they couldn't stop shaking. It was more than just her nerves being shot from the night's events. It was like the two of them saying those three little words had somehow changed the entire dynamic of their relationship.

Their movements were clumsy. The pair shared quiet laughter each time their heads knocked together or when Teddi bit down on Billy's lip just a little too hard. The butterflies in Teddi's stomach were almost overwhelming. Her stomach flipped and turned with every touch, every kiss, and every slow rock of Billy's hips. Teddi's fingers wound themselves into Billy's hair as that wonderfully warm feeling joined the butterflies in her stomach. His fingers dug softly into her hips, his nails leaving small crescent moons in her skin.

Teddi's eyes still ached from all the crying she had done earlier that night. Her eyelids were drooping sleepily as she curled up at Billy's side. He was smoking and talking to her about something. She couldn't really make out what. For the first time in days her mind seemed clear. Empty. Eventually she drifted off into a deep sleep. She didn't dream that night.

xxx

Billy woke up the next morning with a start. Someone was knocking on his bedroom door. "Billy?" Susan called softly. Teddi stirred gently next to him. He shot out of bed, quickly getting dressed before popping his head out of his door. Susan smiled at him somewhat nervously, her hands fiddling together as she hovered awkwardly out in the hall. "Could you do me a favor? Max is staying home today, and I have errands to run...could you maybe watch her? I've been so worried since we heard the news about Will..." she swallowed

thickly. "She's not speaking much. I don't think she'll be much of a bother."

"Yeah," Billy nodded. "Sure, Susan. No problem," Susan could drive Billy crazy on a good day. Now with everything going on and the added fact that he had a naked, sleeping Teddi in his bed made him want to all but shove Susan out of the house. "I'll see you later, huh?" he shut his door, whirling around to focus on Teddi. He almost didn't want to wake her up. She looked so *peaceful*.

He crawled back into bed, wrapping an arm around her middle and burying his face in her neck. "Ted, come on. Time to wake up. Susan's gone so we're in the clear." much like Billy, Teddi wasn't much of a morning person. Teddi let out a whine like groan and turned over, hiding her face in her pillow.

"Can't we just stay here?" she asked, her voice muffled.

Billy let out a chuckle. "Yeah, sure," he pulled his shirt over his head. "But as much as I don't want you to, you should probably put this on. Max's is staying home."

Teddi grumbled, snatching his shirt and slipping it on. As if on cue Max knocked on Billy's door before slowly peeking inside. "...Can you give me a ride to Mike's?"

"Now? It's seven AM." Billy muttered, his lips clamped around a cigarette as he lit it.

"He says it's important. Something about Will and El." she explained. Billy only rolled his eyes. Max looked over at Teddi, who was bundled up under the covers, with a pleading look. "Teddi, make him give me a ride."

Billy scoffed. "She can't *make* me do anything, Max."

If Teddi was given 900 guesses as to what Mike could possibly have to say about Will and El she probably wouldn't be able to guess. So she was pretty intrigued by it. Plus, she wanted to check in on Eleven after the way Mike had treated her the night before at the quarry. "Come on, Billy. Let's give her a ride. What's the worst that can

happen?"

Billy shot her a look. "You honestly have to ask that?" he looked over at Max, and then back at Teddi. This wouldn't be a fight he'd win. "Jesus, *fine*. I'll take you." Max was out of the room and down the hall to change nearly before Billy could even agree. He looked over at Teddi, who was failing to hide a smile. "...You don't make me do anything." he repeated firmly.

"No, no of course not." she said, crawling over him to get out of bed.

Mrs. Wheeler wasn't home when they arrived. Mike said she took Holly out to run errands and wouldn't be back for a few hours. "We have to get El to school. So she can call Will." he explained as he lead Teddi, Billy and Max down to the basement.

Teddi and Billy shared a look. "...What do you mean so she can call Will?" Teddi asked carefully.

"That body they pulled out of the water last night wasn't Will." Mike said firmly.

"Mike..." Max said with a soft sigh.

"No! You have to trust me. Last night Eleven called Will on my walkie. He's still alive. He was singing that song he likes so much. But she can't call him for long. So we need a bigger radio."

"The AV club." Max said, as if it were obvious.

"Exactly. So we're trying to disguise El so we can get her there without anyone noticing her." as the four of them entered the basement, Lucas and Dustin were fitting a blonde wig on Eleven's head. She smiled when she saw Teddi, Billy and Max.

"Oh yeah, that's not conspicuous at all." Billy said sarcastically. Teddi elbowed him harshly in his side. Eleven was hovering awkwardly, her fingers fidgeting with each other as her wide eyes surveyed each person in the room.

Teddi leaned forward, resting her hands on her knees. "What do you think, El? I'm digging the new look."

El smiled softly and nodded. "Pretty."

"Very pretty," Teddi agreed with a smile. "...Has Mike been feeding you?"

Lucas let out a snort. "He gives her half of whatever his mom makes him." he said. Mike shot him a cold look.

Teddi held out her hand. "Come on, I'll make you something while these guys finish up their grand scheme. Can't call Will on an empty stomach, right?" The thing was, Teddi wasn't much of a cook. She lived off things you could pop in a microwave and fast food. But she figured anything she could make would be better than Mike's lukewarm leftovers.

"So...how are things with Mike? Did he apologize?" Teddi asked as she started to rummage through the kitchen cabinets.

Eleven nodded. "Yes."

Teddi looked over her shoulder at the girl and smiled. "...You don't talk much, huh?" she asked. El shook her head, a shy smile forming on her lips. "That's okay. I can talk enough for the both of us. At least that's what Billy says," she said with a soft snort.

There wasn't much in the way of microwaveable food. Which didn't really surprised Teddi much since it was Karen Wheeler's kitchen. Eventually she pulled out a box of Eggos from the freezer, holding it up to Eleven. "How 'bout it?"

Eleven noticeably perked up and nodded. "A girl after my own heart. I'll make you my super special breakfast of champions." she popped four waffles into the toaster.

"You can't feed her waffles and coke." Billy said as he walked into the kitchen.

"And what *should* I feed her?" Teddi asked, grabbing a can of coke and a jar of strawberry jam from the fridge. Eleven watched the exchange quietly, observing the two teens.

"I don't know...what do kids with superpowers eat?"

Teddi rolled her eyes. "What do you think they eat? Radioactive rocks?" Billy pulled a face at her. Teddi spread the jam on each waffle, stacking them onto a plate and topping it off with some whipped cream. "There ya go, Ellie Bean." El looked at the treat with wide eyes before digging in.

Billy groaned beside her. "If you name it you'll get attached, Ted." he warned in a sort of sing songy way.

Teddi shot him a look. "*She* is not an *it*, Billy. And will you stop it with that already? I'm being *nice*." El wasn't paying attention to them anymore. She was nearly shovelling the waffles into her mouth like she hadn't eaten in days.

Billy opened his mouth to argue, but Max and the rest of the kids came running up the stairs. Max looked between Billy and Teddi, taking in their angry expressions. "...What are you two bickering about now?"

"*Nothing*." they said at the same time.

Billy gave Teddi one last look before turning to Mike. "Can we get this over with? Go get in the car." he ordered, shooing the kids through the kitchen and out the front door. Eleven shoved the last bite of waffles in her mouth, wiping some excess whipped cream away with the back of her hand. She smiled up happily at Teddi before running off to join her friends in the van.

If you name it you'll get attached. Teddi scoffed at Billy's words. And why couldn't she? What was so wrong with that? Eleven didn't have anyone. Why couldn't that be Teddi? She knew that this was probably some deep, psychological thing that a therapist would have a field day with. Trying to make up for the shitty childhood she had and all that.

She didn't really care.

xxx

Teddi and Billy dropped the kids and their bikes off at the middle school. They promised that once El got in contact with Will they

would ride their bikes back to Mikes and call them to tell them what happened. Now the pair were at a diner that sat on Hawkin's main street.

"You think they'll find anything?" Teddi asked, absently stirring her strawberry milkshake with her straw. She had her own doubts. Mainly because they had seen Will's body the night before. If he was really alive, how could anyone possibly explain something like that?

"Nope." Billy answered firmly. His mouth was full with chilli cheese fries.

Teddi let out a loud sigh and sunk further into her seat. "Can't you be a little more optimistic?"

"Nope," he repeated, taking a large swig of coke. He let out a soft sigh when he saw the sad look on Teddi's face. "...What do you think they'll find, Ted? I mean, you saw Will's body-

"I know. *I know*...I don't know what I expect. I just hope they find something. For their sake, I guess."

Their conversation was cut off when there was a loud knock on the window beside them. Chief Jim Hopper was looking down at the two teens with a stern look, his hands on his hips and his jaw set tightly. "*Great*..." Billy muttered.

Hopper walked into the diner and over to the two teens. He wasn't in his uniform, which Teddi found a little odd. "Aren't you two supposed to be in school?" he asked, checking his watch.

Billy and Teddi exchanged a look. "...We're sad about Byers." Billy said eventually.

Teddi rolled her eyes. "We *are* sad about Will." she shot Billy a dirty look.

"You know, Powell and Callaghan are looking for you two. They're over at the high school questioning your friends."

Billy noticeably tensed up. "Questioning us for what? We haven't done shit."

Hopper looked over his shoulder quickly before sliding into the booth next to Teddi. "Barb Holland's missing. We got a call from Karen Wheeler. She says you're the last ones to see her."

Teddi's eyes widened. "Barb's *missing*?" she asked. This was a nightmare. An absolute nightmare. "What do you mean she's missing? I thought she was sick."

Hopper raised an eyebrow. "Who said she was sick?"

Billy let out a low groan and sunk in his seat. "Nice going, Larsson." he muttered.

Teddi glared over at Billy. When she turned back to Hopper her expression softened. Teddi was more confused than she had ever been. There had been so many twists and turns the past few days that she barely knew which way was up. But she knew that Hopper would listen. He might not *believe* her, but he would listen. "Barb didn't come to school yesterday. Nancy was worried because I guess Barb left the party early."

"We were already gone by then." Billy interjected, earning another glare from Teddi.

"So I told her that maybe Barb was just sick or something. She cut her hand."

Hopper held up his hand to stop her. "She cut her hand? How?"

"...Shotgunning a beer." Teddi said, not meeting the chief's eyes. Now it was Billy's turn to glare at her.

Thankfully Hopper only gave what passed as a stern look before moving on. "But you two haven't seen her since this party? Haven't heard from her?"

Teddi shook her head. "We left to go pick up Max just after she cut her hand. And he probably couldn't pick her out of a lineup," she jabbed a thumb in Billy's direction. He didn't argue. "Do you think something bad happened? Do you think it's related to what happened to Will?"

Hopper gave her an odd sort of look. Like somehow they were both in on the same secret and he didn't want anyone else to know that they were in on it. But it was gone in a flash. "What happened to Will was an *accident*. It's horrible, and it's sad, but it was an accident. We're gonna get to the bottom of what happened to Barb. And until then I want you two to keep your noses where they belong, okay? No more parties after curfew, and no more skipping school,"

Teddi and Billy both shifted awkwardly. Hopper reached over and took one of Billy's fries. "I'm gonna look the other way this time. But I want you two back in school tomorrow. And *you* stop worrying so much, kid," he put a gentle hand on Teddi's shoulder. "You're gonna give yourself a stroke."

"That's what I've been telling her." Billy said with a smug look. Teddi rolled her eyes.

Hopper looked over at Teddi with a sort of teasing smile. "See? You know if it's serious if me and him are agreeing. You two stay safe, okay? I gotta get going," he rose from the booth, turning and pointing a finger at each of them. "School tomorrow." he reminded them. Billy gave a mock salute and Hopper was off.

There was a long silence before Teddi finally spoke up. "We need to do something."

Billy let out a sigh. "Like what, Ted? Go monster hunting?"

"Exactly."

"*Teddi-*"

Teddi leaned across the table and looked at Billy with a tired expression. "Did you see Hop's face when I brought up Will? It's like he *knows* something. Maybe he knows what we know, and he just doesn't want to say it."

"You mean about the Demo..." he drifted off, clearly not able to remember the name.

"*Demogorgon*," Teddi finished for him. Billy gave her a look. One that said '*do you hear how crazy you sound?*' Of course she knew that. But

she was past the point of caring. "They said that Will *drowned*, Billy. What are the chances that Will drowns and Barb runs away? You know that Quarry. We used to hang out there all the time in middle school. If you fell into it you would be dead before you hit the water. Every single bone in your body would break. You saw his body. Did it look like anything was broken to you?"

Billy couldn't argue that point. There had been this rumor when they were kids that some guy had fallen into the quarry back in the 60's, and when the cops dragged his body out of the water he looked like a jellyfish. Will definitely hadn't looked like that. He hadn't had a scratch on him.

Billy took another bite of his chili fries before thoughtfully looking over at Teddi. "Well, what's the plan, Teddi Bear? We're gonna go camp out in the woods until something tries to kill us?"

xxx

"This is one of the dumbest fucking things I've ever done," Billy muttered. "And that includes the time we were gonna run away to Disneyland when we were ten." Billy and Teddi were sitting in Teddi's van. They had driven a little ways into the woods, not far enough to lose their way from the main road, but far enough in that no one driving past could see them.

"...That was a pretty decent plan." Teddi defended. It wasn't. Somehow they had seemed to think they could actually *walk* to California with nothing but some clothes and their toothbrushes shoved into their backpacks. Hopper had found them about twenty minutes into their grand escape plan. He took them to the bakery down the street from the police station, bought them both donuts and talked to them about what things were like at home before he took them back to school. Steve had been pretty pissed that they hadn't invited him along.

Billy turned in his seat and pointed back where there was a bottle of kerosene and a can of Billy's hairspray they had tossed into the back of the van. "How can you say *any* plan is worse than this?" he asked.

"It was *your* idea to be Smokey Bear's worst nightmare, Hargrove. Not

mine," she argued. Teddi shut the van off and hopped out. Billy grabbed the kerosene and hairspray and got out behind her, muttering angrily. "Besides, we have to be able to defend ourselves somehow, right?"

Billy gave her a tired look. "Defend ourselves against the make believe monster? Oh, sure," he turned to the woods that sat before them. "Watch out, Demogorgons! Lifeguards on duty!" he called sarcastically.

"Be quiet!" Teddi hissed out, slapping her hand over his mouth. "If there is something out there it'll know that we're here!"

Billy rolled his eyes and pushed Teddi's hand away. "Let's just get this over with." he muttered.

Teddi let out an annoyed huff and took off ahead of Billy. She hated when he got like this. All grouchy and stubborn. It was rare that it was aimed in her direction, but Teddi was never one to put up with Billy's attitude.

Billy's jaw tightened as he watched his girlfriend venture further into the woods without him. He let out an annoyed breath out of his nose and followed after her, nearly stomping like a toddler having a tantrum. Teddi flicked on her flashlight, the bright beam illuminating their path.

Billy was firm in his belief that there wasn't anything in the woods. But still, he had to admit he felt a little uneasy the further they walked. It wasn't too far. If he turned around he could probably still see the outline of Teddi's van. But he couldn't help but feel like they shouldn't be there. Like they were trespassing almost.

He felt like they were being watched. The little hairs on the back of his neck were standing on end. Billy tried his hardest to make his eyes adjust to the dark. He couldn't see anything or anyone. But there was something out there. He could hear something moving around them. Getting closer.

Teddi jumped a little when she felt Billy's hand gently touch her arm. He had caught up to her, taking a step or two ahead as if he were

trying to shield her from something. She opened her mouth to let out some sassy comment when Billy held a finger up to his lips to quiet her. She frowned up at him, watching in confusion as he surveyed the area around them. He started fumbling for the lighter in his jean jacket.

"Billy, what-" Teddi's question was cut off by a horrible screech. It was that same horrible sound they had heard the night Will went missing. It was close. Teddi's entire body started to tingle. Her hands couldn't stop shaking. The scream had been so loud she could hear a quiet ringing in her ears.

Billy wrapped his hand around Teddi's wrist and he pulled her closer to him. "We're going back to the van." it wasn't a suggestion. Teddi wasn't going to argue. There was a loud snap somewhere nearby. Teddi jumped at the sound. Something was coming towards them. Slowly.

Teddi couldn't help herself. She shined the light of her flashlight to their left. The beam of light was shaky, but she saw a flash of something moving over behind the trees. She let out a small gasp, and Billy's hand tightened around her.

"What the fuck is that?" Billy asked. He was breathing heavily. He pushed Teddi further behind him and took on a defensive stance. It was an animal, he thought. It was too big to be a coyote. Too thin to be a bear. Whatever it was, he was sure it was stalking them.

There was another loud snap. Teddi pointed the flashlight out in front of them. She'd caught it this time. Neither of them knew what they were looking at. It was...a creature. Nothing they'd ever seen before. It was on all fours. It had paused mid stride. It had a long, thin, almost sort of gangly grey body. It didn't have a face. It's head almost looked like a flower that hadn't bloomed just yet.

Teddi's hands were shaking so badly she almost dropped the flashlight. She felt Billy's entire body go tense. Her heart was pounding so loudly in her ears that she almost hadn't heard him. "When I tell you to run, you run back to the van and you don't look back."

The monster slowly rose to its feet before them. It easily had to be seven feet tall. Teddi suddenly noticed the way that its long, thin fingers ended in sharp points. She thought she would be sick. Its face opened, revealing six red petal like appendages that were lined with rows of tiny, sharp teeth. It let out that horrible scream again. Billy told her to run. She did. She knew that Billy was behind her as she carried herself back through the woods and to the van. The monster wasn't far behind them. Teddi let out a startled gasp as it screeched again, stumbling over some branches.

Her van was close by. She could see it through her blurry, tear filled vision. Teddi willed her legs to move faster. She couldn't let herself think about what would happen if that thing caught her.

Billy was telling her to get in the van. He had slowed down behind her. Teddi threw the driver's side door open as Billy came to a stop in front of the van. He held up the lighter to the can of hairspray, a large flame shooting out in front of him and towards the creature.

It screeched again. Like it was in pain. Teddi started the van, screaming for Billy to get in. He didn't let up with his makeshift flamethrower until he was safely back inside next to her. "Hit it." He said firmly.

"What?" Teddi asked helplessly. She felt like she couldn't catch her breath.

"Run the fucking thing over!" He yelled.

Teddi slammed her foot down on the gas. There was a loud crunch. The entire van lurched forward as she collided with the monster. She was sure the front of her van had been crushed. It felt like she had run into a semi truck. Teddi threw the van into reverse and sped backwards towards the main road before taking off down the street.

She didn't let up on the gas until Mirkwood was no longer in view.

5. Chapter Five: First Blood

A/N: Sorry this is late! On top of working so much I've been sick. So it's been real fun. I will apologize with more poorly written smut, some soft boy Billy and a team up with Jancy!

xxx

After what felt like forever, Teddi finally pulled into her driveway. She and Billy were silent. They were both breathing heavily. Teddi's arms and legs felt like they would never stop shaking. "That...*thing* practically lives in your goddamn backyard, Teddi." Billy finally said.

"I know." she gasped out. If she turned around, she could see Mirkwood out of van's back window. Teddi was gripping onto the steering wheel so tightly that her knuckles had turned white.

"...Are you okay?" Billy asked carefully.

Teddi nodded. "...You?" she looked over at him, silence falling over them once more as they watched each other. *We could have died*, Teddi kept thinking. Her brain kept screaming it at her. Tonight could have been the last time she had ever seen Billy. *You and me till the end*, she thought, eyes trained on Billy, who had stayed behind to make sure she was safe. Billy, who she loved more than she could really, fully understand.

They both moved at the same time. Teddi threw her arms around Billy's shoulders while he grabbed her waist, pulling her out of her seat and into his lap. Their lips met in a bruising kiss. That feeling of not being able to catch her breath was back. It was like she couldn't get close enough to him. Billy let out a low growl as Teddi rolled her hips, grinding down against him.

Their kisses were all teeth. Their hands were grabbing, clawing at each other. Billy shoved Teddi's denim skirt up her thighs, his fingers digging into her skin tightly, like if he let go she would disappear right before his eyes. She was sure that she would have bruises the next day. She didn't care. Her swollen lips had found a home at Billy's neck. Billy's eyes fell shut, his head falling back against the headrest

as Teddi bit at his pulse point. She ran her tongue over it, relishing in that small, beating reminder that Billy was *alive* and they had survived the night.

Billy ran his hand up through Teddi's sandy blonde hair, giving it a soft tug and pulling her from him. He kissed her deeply, his other hand just barely grazing the inside of her thigh before disappearing into the band of her cotton panties. The way the Teddi slowly moaned out his name into his ear made Billy slow his motions, enjoying the way he was teasing her. He smirked up at her before capturing her lips again.

Teddi couldn't take it anymore. She blindly reached down, her fingers fumbling with Billy's belt buckle. Their breathing picked up as she yanked his belt free. As Teddi unbuttoned his jeans, Billy pushed her panties to the side. They each let out a hiss as she sunk down onto him. There was no real rhythm to either of their movements. Teddi's hips rolled and rocked desperately, Billy was gripping tightly onto her waist thrusting upwards to meet her with enough force to send a small, but wonderful sense of pain through her. Pain was good, she decided. It was a reminder that she had made it out alive.

Teddi breathed out Billy's name as they reached the high that they had been chasing. She rested her forehead against his as their bodies stilled, running her fingers through his curls. Billy's hands were running slowly up and down Teddi's thighs as he reached up, kissing her one last time.

"...I'm glad you didn't get eaten." Teddi finally said, breaking the silence.

Billy let out a soft laugh. "*Ditto*."

Teddi smiled, biting down on her lip. "We should probably get inside, huh?" they straightened out their clothes, Billy helping Teddi out of the van before they snuck across the front lawn and to the side of the house to Teddi's bedroom window. Teddi wordlessly made her way across her room and into the bathroom. When he heard the shower turn on, Billy followed after her. Neither of them spoke as they squeeze into Teddi's tiny shower. They just wanted to wash the night off of them. And Teddi desperately wanted to sleep.

She sunk into bed with a low groan. Her whole body ached. The bed dipped next to her as Billy laid down beside her. The pair stared up at the little glow in the dark stars that Teddi had stuck to the ceiling. "...Do you think that's what got Barb?" she asked, her voice sounding small. Billy didn't answer. He didn't need to. They both knew the answer. "I think...I think that's what I saw that night out by Steve's pool. I thought maybe it was Johnathan after Carol told us about the pictures but..." it had been dark enough that Teddi could have mistaken the Demogorgon for a human. Had it been watching them? Waiting to see which of them it wanted to prey on? Her stomach lurched when she imagined what it might have done to Barb.

"We have to tell the kids," she said. "There's no way in hell they're going back out into the woods. I don't care if El can move things with her mind. And we have to kill that thing, Billy. Before it can get anyone else."

Billy didn't disagree. He'd be dead before he let Max go anywhere near those woods. Or any of the kids. But this was bigger than the two of them. This was a *monster*. An actual monster. Billy thought that the only monsters they would face were their dads. But they paled in comparison to the Demogorgon. "...How?" he asked.

Teddi rolled out of bed. She flicked the light on her nightstand on and headed over to a bubblegum pink duffle bag that had been tossed by her closet. She rummaged around in it for a few seconds before she came back. Billy sat up and eyed the ratty notebook in her hands. "What am I looking at here?" he asked with a raised eyebrow.

Teddi was flipping furiously through the pages. "It's my campaign notebook for Dungeons and Dragons. I think I can maybe find something...here!" she held the notebook up to Billy to show him. He didn't really know what he was looking at if he was honest. He scanned Teddi's small, curly handwriting trying to take in as much as he could. She pointed her finger a line that mentioned Will the Wise. "We don't run into the Demogorgon often, but enough for me to know a little bit about how we can maybe stop it." she explained.

Billy smirked over at her, amused with how excited she sounded. "You know, it's pretty hot when you get all nerdy like this, Ted." he teased.

Her cheeks turned a light shade of pink. "...That's definitely the first time I've ever heard that," she confessed before shaking her head and focusing on the task at hand. "The Demogorgon is a chaotic evil. It's this demon god that has a cult following," she began. Billy only blinked at her. Teddi waved her hand. "Forget it. Whenever we've encountered it in the game before, Will always casts fireball. If the spell *works* then it's usually enough to defeat it."

"...Where are we supposed to get a fireball?" Billy asked.

"We don't need a literal fireball. When you used the hairspray and the lighter, it scared it. So it doesn't seem to like fire. What I'm trying to say, is that if the basics from the game work against the Demogorgon in Hawkins we might actually be able to kill it." she said with a wide grin.

Billy laid back, resting his hands behind his head as he contemplated everything Teddi was saying. He cracked a small smile. "Let's just hope there's no cult, right?" he joked. Teddi went silent. Her eyes went wide. Billy's smile faded. "...Ted?"

"The power outage," she said. "The night that Will went missing. The power in the arcade and like the whole town went out. And El said that *bad men* were after her...someone has to be responsible for the Demogorgon being here."

Billy groaned. "Are you saying whoever was experimenting on the kid brought a monster here? I was kidding about the whole cult thing."

"But you're right! Someone had to have been behind all of this! We have to tell Hopper." Teddi moved to get back out of bed, but Billy grabbed her by the arm and pulled her back. She let out a huff and glared over at him.

"Ted. *Babe*. It's almost one in the morning. We were almost eaten by a monster from a board game. I think we need to take the rest of the night off and call Hop tomorrow," Teddi knew he was right. She hated it when he was right. "Come on," he patted the bed. "Get in bed. You're stressing me out," with a grumble Teddi laid back down next to him. Billy wrapped an arm around her and pulled her close to him before shutting the light back off. "So, what...is Will some kinda

wizard or something?" he asked after a long moment of silence.

Teddi smiled. She wasn't sure if it was at his question, or the fact that he was talking about Will in the present tense. "He's a cleric," Billy was quiet. "It's sort of a mix between a warrior and a wizard, I guess." she explained as best as Billy would be able to understand.

"And what are you?"

"I'm a paladin. Me and Mike are...that's probably why we're always arguing."

"...Well, what would I be?" he asked.

"Honestly?...Probably a barbarian."

Teddi could practically hear him frowning. "I don't think I like the implications of your tone there, Ted."

"You shouldn't," she giggled and squirmed when he gently pinched her side. They fell into a comfortable silence for a bit. "...Where do you think we could go where there aren't monsters?" she asked suddenly. "What about New Orleans?" she offered.

Billy smiled. "You wanna go to New Orleans?" he asked.

"I wanna see all the stuff from Interview with the Vampire." she said with a shrug.

Billy laughed and rolled his eyes. "Of course this is about a book."

Teddi smiled, looking up at him. "I like Lestat. He reminds me of you."

Billy considered the idea. He'd imagined the two of them running off from Hawkins one day. They'd quite literally been trying to get out since they were kids. He never knew where they would go. California was usually a pretty popular choice between them. He could see them settling down there. But there was a chance they'd be happier anywhere that wasn't Hawkins. "...Maybe we can go on a road trip," he suggested. "Save up our money. See what's out there and choose where we want to go."

Teddi let out a yawn and nodded. "I like that idea...we have to take Steve this time, though," she joked.

Billy let out a snort. "Yeah, we'll see about that," Teddi yawned again. He gently nudged her side. "Get some sleep, Ted." she didn't argue. Teddi leaned up and pressed a small kiss on Billy's jaw before her head settled on his chest. It didn't take long before they both drifted off to sleep.

They both dreamed of the demogorgon stalking them through the woods that night.

xxx

School was cancelled the next day. Will's funeral was early that morning. Billy managed to sneak out before Teddi's dad came downstairs to tell her that they would be going to the funeral as a family. Teddi was a little surprised her dad even knew Will's name.

She was still exhausted from the night before. Her eyes kept begging her for just *five more minutes* of sleep as she got ready. Teddi hoped she wouldn't fall asleep during the funeral. Just because she, Billy and the kids knew that Will was still alive didn't mean she could let herself slip up like that. Especially when she imagined how angry it would make her father to embarrass him in front of half the town.

Teddi pulled on black, long sleeved skater dress for the funeral. Her mom gave her a black coat and a pair of heels to wear instead of her usual puffy jacket and boots so she'd look more presentable. The car ride to the cemetery was quiet. Teddi had a hard time remembering the last time she had ridden in the car with her parents. It definitely hadn't been since she was little. Her mother was fidgeting with a white kerchief between her fingers. No doubt a prop for when she turned on the pretend water works later to make people think she cared about Will. Teddi had to keep herself from rolling her eyes.

Billy was there. He was standing a foot or two away from Neil, Susan and Max. He was wearing a suit, Teddi was surprised to see. Of course it looked good on him. His back was turned to the group of people that were gathering around Will's grave. He had a cigarette pinched between his fingers. He looked as tired as Teddi was. Neil

shook her father's hand and Susan gave her mother what barely counted as a hug. Teddi wouldn't say that her and Billy's parents were friends. She knew that Neil didn't like her or the fact that she was so close with Billy. But her parents were rich, and her father had an important, flashy job, so Neil sucked up when he could. Teddi knew if her parents had their way she'd probably be dating Steve.

Teddi and Max shared a small smile as Billy made his way over. "You shouldn't be smoking here, Billy." Neil muttered. Billy only rolled his eyes. Billy stood next to Teddi, the backs of his fingers just barely brushing against hers. Teddi hooked her middle finger with his, the cold metal of his ring a nice feeling against her skin. They stayed like that for the entire funeral. Teddi noticed the boys weren't trying quite as hard as she was to keep acting as though Will was really gone. At one point Karen Wheeler had to tell them to be quiet. Billy rolled his eyes.

Teddi was a little surprised that Hopper wasn't there. This definitely wasn't the sort of thing he would miss. She was even more surprised to see that Johnathan and Will's father Lonnie had actually showed up. Just when she thought things couldn't get any stranger.

Joyce looked like she was on another planet completely. Teddi's heart ached for her. She couldn't imagine what she must have been going through these past few days. It was taking almost all of her energy not to run over to her and telling her all about El, the Demogorgon and Mike's theory that the body sitting in the coffin in front of them wasn't actually Will.

Once the funeral was over and everyone started to head to the reception that was being held in the church, Billy nudged Teddi. He nodded his head to something. "Check that out," Teddi followed his gaze. Johnathan Byers and Nancy Wheeler were huddled together. They were looking at some piece of paper, but Teddi couldn't make out what it was. "Those two look awful cozy, don't they?" he smirked.

Teddi rolled her eyes. "It's nothing. Like Nancy would mess around behind Steve's back with Johnathan freakin' Byers," she had to admit though, it was odd. Especially considering the fact that Johnathan had just been caught taking those creepy pictures of them at Steve's party. Teddi took Billy's hand in hers and pulled him along towards

the church. "Forget them. Let's get inside. At least we can get some food out of this bullshit."

Max, Dustin, Lucas and Mike were inside and crowded around their science teacher, who was talking to them about something animatedly. Teddi rolled her eyes when she saw her father, Neil, Lonnie and Ted Wheeler crowded together. "Birds of a feather..." Teddi muttered. Billy smirked as they made their way over to the snacks. She popped a Nilla Wafer in her mouth and frowned. "Aw, man. These are store brand."

"That's what I said," Teddi jumped at the sound of Dustin's voice behind her. The four preteens were lined up, looking expectantly at Billy and Teddi. "We need a ride." Dustin explained.

"Need a ride where?" Billy asked.

"Back to my house. We'll explain when we get there. We have news about..." Mike looked around and leaned in a little closer. "*You know who.*" he whispered.

"Oh, so do we! *Big news.*" Teddi said.

Billy shot a glance over at where Neil was standing before nodding his head, motioning for them to follow him. None of the adults would care if they left. They'd probably already forgotten any of them were there. So they piled into the Camaro, the four kids squeezing into the back seat and headed to the Wheeler's house.

El was in the basement, still dressed in her pink dress and wig. She smiled when she saw Teddi come down the stairs. Teddi plopped down on the couch next to her. "Alright, so who wants to share their news first?" she asked.

Mike didn't hesitate. "We know where Will is." he announced.

Lucas rolled his eyes. "Mike, don't get their hopes up. It's not that simple. We know where he is, but we don't know how to get to him." he corrected.

Teddi raised an eyebrow. "...Meaning?"

"Upside Down." El said next to her.

"The hell is Upside Down?" Billy asked, a cigarette pinched between his lips as he lit it.

"You can't smoke in here," Mike said sternly. Billy only looked at him. Mike rolled his eyes. "The Upside Down is a different dimension. It's like the Vale of Shadows. It's like here, but opposite. Something opened a gate and the Demogorgon got through and took Will. We have to find where the gate is, and how to open it."

"What about her?" Billy asked, nodding at El. "It was her Demogorgon cult that brought the damn thing here," the kids all stared up at him. "...What? I know some shit too."

Teddi shook her head. "Nooo way. You guys aren't going to find the gate. *We* will find the gate," she motioned between Billy and herself. "We saw that thing last night out in Mirkwood. You guys aren't going anywhere near it."

"You *saw* it?" Max asked, a little too excited considering how traumatizing it had been for them. "What did it look like? What's it doing out there? Was there any sign of Will?" she asked.

"Slow your roll, Mad Max," Billy said coolly. "We don't know what it was doing out there. We were too busy trying to keep it from eating us. Teddi's right. You guys are keeping your asses parked in this basement while we handle it."

"El could totally stop it!" Dustin argued. "You should have seen what she did to Troy Walsh at school yesterday." he laughed. Teddi couldn't help but smile at Eleven's proud look.

Billy held up his hand. "*No discussions*. Got it?" he asked, looking at each of them. "I *said*, got it?" he repeated when no one answered.

"Yeah, Billy. We got it." Max rolled her eyes. Teddi didn't miss the fact that Max was the only one to speak up. She knew the kids would try to sneak out later that night to look for the gate. Which just meant she and Billy would need to find it before they did.

It was clear that Billy didn't believe them either. He shot each of

them one last glare before letting out a tired sigh and running a hand over his face. "C'mon, Teddi. I'll take you home."

Teddi got up from her spot on the couch, turning to face the party when she reached Billy's side. "Seriously, guys. Don't go out there alone, okay? That thing...it's not something any of you want to mess with. Believe me." her eyes met with El's, and Teddi saw understanding there. Fear. Had El seen the Demogorgon too?

The kids remained silent. Teddi realized that there would be no convincing them. They would do whatever they needed to do to get Will home safe. And Teddi couldn't blame them. She was doing the same thing herself. She just hoped that she and Billy found the gate *and* the Demogorgon before anyone else did.

xxx

After Billy dropped Teddi off back at her place, Steve came over. He caught her when she was on her porch, unlocking her door. "Teddi! Can we talk for a sec?" he asked as he jogged towards her.

"Steve, hey," she smiled thinly at him. "...Is everything okay?"

"I was gonna ask you the same thing," he said with a small laugh. "I feel like you and Billy are ignoring me or something. Is this about what happened with Byers at school the other day? Because-"

Teddi held up her hand. "Wait, what? What happened with Johnathan?"

Steve shifted from foot to foot uncomfortably. He rubbed the back of his neck and looked down at his shoes. "Tommy and Carol told me he was taking pictures of us at my place. So we waited out by his car to ask about it...I kinda smashed his camera." he admitted.

"Steve."

"I *know*," he groaned, throwing his head back. "I feel like a dick. But I couldn't let him get away with it, Teddi. And Tommy got me all riled up about it...I turn into such an asshole around that guy." he did. So did Billy. Even Teddi had her moments.

"I think maybe the three of us need to take a little break from Tommy and Carol." Teddi said, scrunching her nose.

Steve nodded. "Definitely...so you guys aren't mad at me or anything? Freezing me out?" Teddi realized it probably looked that way. Especially after Billy had practically chased Steve away from her van the other day at school. But they were just trying to keep Steve from getting involved. He didn't need to know about all of the weird shit in Hawkins.

"We're not freezing you out, Steve. I promise," she reassured him. "Me and Billy have just had a lot going on. Lots of..." she tried to think of the simplest way to say it.

Steve grinned. "Lots of couple stuff?" he finished for her.

Teddi let out a soft laugh and nodded. "Couple stuff."

Steve leaned against her front door. "Took you guys long enough. Just don't forget about me, okay?" he said with a teasing smile.

"I could never forget you, Harrington."

"True. I am pretty unforgettable. Anyways, I should get going. I'm supposed to pick Nancy up to go to the movies. Hey, the four of us should go out sometime. Like a double date." Teddi thought back to seeing Nancy all huddled together with Johnathan Byers. She thought it was better not to say anything to Steve about it.

"Definitely," she nodded. "Maybe this weekend?" that was if she and Billy didn't get eaten by a monster at least.

"Sounds good. See ya, Ted." he waved, jogging back down the driveway and heading back to his house. Teddi hurried inside. Her parents were still out. Most likely still at the funeral trying to make people think they cared. She hurried down the entryway hall, past the kitchen and to her father's study. He had a big filing cabinet that sat behind his desk that he never bothered to lock.

He had a map of Hawkins in one of the drawers. Her father had maps of almost everything in town. Teddi never really thought much of it. It was just part of his job. Whatever that even was. But now wasn't

really the time to think of things like that. Right now she had to try and figure out where the gate to the Upside Down was.

"Theodora! Are you home?" Teddi jumped at the sound of her father's voice. She quickly rolled the map up, shutting the filing cabinet drawer shut and poking her head out of the office's door. Her parents were by the front door. Her father was helping her mom take her coat off before hanging it up. "What are you doing in my office?" thankfully he seemed more confused than upset.

"Sorry, um I have to head to work soon so Billy gave me a ride home. I didn't wanna drag you away from everyone...can I borrow this?" she held up the map.

Greg raised an eyebrow, fixing a stern look in her direction. "What do you need that for?"

"...School project." Teddi lied.

He rolled his eyes. "As long as you take good care of it. I want it back in one piece. And don't you go back into my office without my permission." he ordered.

"Yes, sir. Thank you!" she hurried past her parents and downstairs to her bed room. She quickly changed for work before calling Billy.

"Yeah?" he answered, already sounding bored with the conversation.

"Billy, it's me. I need you to meet me at the arcade. It's super important."

"Is it *actually* important or are you dragging me down there to show me you changed all the Dragon's Lair high score names to swear words again?"

"It's actually important," she huffed. "It's about...you know. Just come to the arcade, okay? I'm on my way there now." she didn't give him a chance to argue. She slammed the phone back down into its cradle and was off.

The arcade wasn't very busy. It was a pretty quiet afternoon in Hawkins. It was almost like the whole town was in grieving for Will.

Teddi had her dad's map laid out on the prize counter. She was using tokens to mark out the things she wanted to show Billy to avoid marking the map and facing her father's wrath.

Billy sauntered in about twenty minutes after her shift started. He had swapped out his suit for jeans, a Motley Crue shirt and his leather jacket. Teddi figured he was late because he was trying to decide what to wear. "Alright, Larsson. What's the big deal?" he leaned against the counter casually.

Teddi tapped down at the map. "I think I've narrowed down where the gate is," she said excitedly. She set her finger in the center of a small triangle she had created with three tokens. "This is where they started looking for Will with the search party, and this is Steve and Will's house. So I don't think that the Demogorgon goes very far whenever it's out. I'm thinking the gate must be somewhere in this part of the woods. It's not exact, but at least we've narrowed it down."

Billy looked over his shoulder. "Should we be talking about this here?"

Teddi rolled her eyes. "The Coulson twins are the only ones in here. Keith is next door. It's fine. I'm thinking we should go back tonight. We can be better prepared this time. I mean, we know it doesn't like fire."

Billy let out a soft groan. "I don't know about this, Ted...we barely made it out last time." he argued. And he was right. This was stupid and dangerous. But it had to be done. She had to protect her friends.

"If we don't do it then the kids are gonna go looking for it. We're lucky that Will survived. We might not be that lucky again."

Billy was quiet for a long time. He was weighing his options. There weren't really very many for him to consider. "...Fine. We'll go. I can go to the liquor store and pick some bottles up with my fake ID."

Teddi frowned. "The hell are you gonna do with those? Get the Demogorgon drunk?" she asked.

Billy rolled his eyes. "Funny. I'm gonna make some molotov

cocktails." he crossed his arms.

"Who are you? *Rambo*?" she laughed.

"Well do you have a better idea?" she didn't. Being destructive is what Billy did best. It was probably better to let him take charge in this case. "That's what I thought. I'll come back later after your shift and pick you up. I wanna get this shit *over with* so everything can go back to normal." but Teddi was pretty sure that wasn't possible. Someone had faked Will's death, conjured up a monster in Hawkins and experimented on a little girl. Things were anything but normal now.

xxx

Teddi would have been lying if she said she wasn't scared to go back out into the woods. She and Billy were a little more prepared this time around. She had a backpack full of monster slaying gear and Billy was still insistent on his molotov cocktails. But they were still no match for the Demogorgon, she knew it.

"So what's the plan?" Billy asked as they made their way further into the woods. They each had a flashlight this time around. They were also much more alert.

Teddi shrugged. "We burn it. I don't really have a plan B." she confessed.

"Oh, great..." Billy muttered. He was trying his hardest to hide how afraid he was. If he was afraid he knew it would put Teddi on edge. And he hadn't missed the way that the beam of light from her flashlight kept shaking the further they ventured into Mirkwood.

Billy hadn't heard anything, but Teddi let out a small gasp and jumped. She started to shine her flashlight every which way. "Did you hear that?" she asked, her eyes wide.

"No...what did it sound like?"

Teddi had stopped walking. She spun in a circle, trying to find who or what had made the sound she had heard. "It sounded like voices..." she frowned. "Who the hell could be out here this late?" she asked no one in particular. She walked off without Billy.

"Jesus, Teddi, wait up!" he hissed, jogging to catch up with her. She was no longer looking for the monster. Teddi moved further into the woods. "I didn't hear anything. Maybe you're just freaking yourself out-" something hard collided with Billy, knocking him to the ground.

"Sorry! Sorry...Billy? What the hell are you doing out here?" it was Johnathan Byers. Teddi whipped around to face the two boys. Johnathan held his hand out to Billy, who smacked it away. He got back on his feet and brushed the dirt and leaves from his pants.

"Johnathan!" Teddi spat. "You can't be out here! It's not safe!"

"What are you doing anyways? Taking more pervy pictures?" Billy sneered.

Johnathan looked frazzled. And not because of Billy. His breathing was uneven like he had been running. "What? That's not- look, I don't have *time* for this. I'm looking for Nancy-"

"Wheeler?" Teddi asked, her eyebrows raised.

"What gives, Byers? You think if you keep stalking her she'll dump Steve for your weird ass? And why the fuck do you have a gun?"

"*Billy.*" Teddi scolded him.

Johnathan held his hands up. "Nancy is about to get eaten by a monster! I have to find her!"

That shut Billy up. Billy and Teddi both went into action. Flashing their flashlights all around for any sign Nancy. If Teddi listened closely enough she thought maybe she could hear her calling for Johnathan. Her voice sounded strange, though. Like she was underwater almost.

She didn't waste any time. Teddi ran off in the direction she thought Nancy's voice was coming from. Johnathan and Billy were calling after her but she didn't stop. Nancy's voice was getting closer and closer the further she ran.

Eventually she stopped at a tree that looked like it was covered in some sort of web-like slime. The tree almost looked alive. There was

a red, glowing light that pulsed inside of it almost like a heartbeat. Teddi could only assume that this was the gate. It had to be. And Nancy had gone through it. Teddi thought back to her first run in with the Demogorgon. She couldn't let Nancy face that thing alone.

So Teddi crawled through the membrane. She winced at the slimy feeling of it against her skin. It was cold on the other side. Much colder than in Mirkwood. It was snowing. No, it wasn't snow. Teddi couldn't really make out what was falling down around her.

Wherever she was, it looked like Mirkwood. But it was different. It felt like she was stuck in some sort of dream. Everything seemed slower, colder, darker. There was thunder booming above her. Like a storm was approaching. The sky was a bright red shade that contrasted dramatically against the blue hue that surrounded her.

Teddi swallowed thickly, slowly turning in a circle and looking for any sign that Nancy was nearby. But there was no Nancy. And thankfully no Demogorgon. Now Teddi found herself alone and trapped in the Upside Down.

6. Chapter Six: Snitches Get Stitches

A/N: Poor Teddi. That's all I really have to say. Just...poor Teddi

xxx

Teddi couldn't hear Nancy's voice anymore. She had been using Nancy's cries for Johnathan almost like a very twisted game of Marco Polo. Just when she thought she was close enough to finally find Nancy, she heard that terrible screech from the Demogorgon. She hadn't had any other choice but to hide. Teddi wouldn't be any help to Nancy if she got herself eaten.

Her hands were shaking as she crouched down as small as she could make herself by the trunk of a tree and fishing the black bic Billy had gotten her earlier that day out of her pocket. It wasn't much, but it was *something*. She couldn't let herself go down without a fight.

Johnathan started to call for Nancy. Teddi shut her eyes tightly, praying that he would stop. Any sound would alert the monster. She could hear it slowly moving through the woods, searching for whoever had trespassed in it's home. It was chasing after Nancy before Teddi could really process it.

Nancy was headed back towards the tree Teddi had entered through. Nancy was screaming Johnathan's name the entire way. She wasn't going to make it on her own. The monster was too fast. Teddi reached blindly out in front of her for anything to throw. Her hand closed around a thick branch, and Teddi whipped around, throwing it towards the Demogorgon. She missed, but it had done its job. The branch bounced off the trunk of a tree, but it was enough to catch the creature's attention if just for a second.

The Demogorgon turned to look in Teddi's direction. Teddi let out a gasp, sinking to the ground and using the tree for cover. She didn't see if Nancy made it out. She just had to hope that she had. The monster let out a hiss like noise and started towards Teddi. She covered her mouth, trying to quiet herself as best as she could. Her cheeks and hand were slick with tears she hadn't realized were running down her face. It purred as it crept closer to her. Like a cat

that was finally going to catch the canary.

"Teddi!" it was Billy. His voice sounded far away, like Nancy's had. Teddi couldn't answer back. If she did she'd be dead.

Billy ran as fast as his legs would carry him. He yelled Teddi's name, his heart pounding faster in chest when there was still no response. Johnathan was close behind him, calling for Nancy and Teddi almost relentlessly. Billy's breathing was harsh and uneven, his lungs on fire. He refused to think of all the possibilities of where Teddi could be.

"Johnathan!" it was Nancy. Her voice was hoarse as she called for him. Billy couldn't tell where it was that her voice was coming from. Johnathan stopped in his tracks, whipping around as he flashed his flashlight in every direction.

"There," Johnathan panted, pointing to a tree that sat in front of him. "I think- I think it's coming from there." he dropped to his knees, flashing his light at what looked like a hole that was small enough for someone or *something* to crawl through.

"The hell is that?" Billy asked, looking at the slimy gateway in disgust.

Johnathan shook his head. "I don't know...but I'm willing to bet that's where the girls are. Nancy!" he called again. He let out a shaky, relieved breath when she called back. "Nancy! I'm here! Follow my voice!" the two boys stood there, holding their breath for what felt like forever before Nancy's hand finally shoved it's way back through the gate. Billy and Johnathan moved at the same time, grabbing hold of her and pulling her out.

Nancy fell on top of Johnathan, sobbing into his shoulder. "Was Teddi in there?" Billy asked. "Did you see her? See anyone else?"

Nancy sniffed, looking up at Billy like she was surprised to see him. "What? No. No, there wasn't anyone else but that *thing*...she didn't go in after me, did she?" she asked, looking between the two boys. Neither of them had to answer. "We have to go back! We have to get her before the monster sees her-" she moved back towards the tree, but Johnathan pulled her back.

"You're not going back in there. We'll go." he argued.

Billy's hands were balled up into tight fists. His palms stung from his nails digging into the skin. He didn't know what to do. There was no way of knowing if Teddi had gone through the barrier or not. There was no way to know if the Demogorgon had already gotten to her, or if it was waiting for him on the other side. Billy called Teddi's name again. There was no answer. His heart was beating so loudly in his ears he was worried he might not hear her even if she did.

"I'll go," he said finally. "You stay here with Nancy. And if I'm not back in ten minutes, you get the hell out of here and go call Hopper. Got it?" Johnathan nodded, putting a protective arm around Nancy.

Billy opened up his backpack, grabbing one of the liquor bottles and shoving his lighter into his back pocket. He looked at the gate one more time before taking in a deep breath and crawling through. It was a horrible feeling. Slimy, wet and cold. Everything in him told him he shouldn't be there. Once he was on the other side, it was like Mike had described. It looked like Hawkins, but different. Evil.

There was a clap of thunder above him. Billy jumped, looking up at the red sky above him. There was a massive, black form lurking there in the middle of the storm. It didn't have much of a body. Just a head and long, spider like arms. He didn't like looking at it. His body wanted to run, but he couldn't. He was frozen there. All of his thoughts felt...fuzzy. Incomplete. Like hearing the radio frequencies in between channels that was all static and garbled voices. Billy swallowed thickly. The only thought he could hear clearly was the fear that he would never leave this place.

A screech finally pulled him back to reality. The Demogorgon. Billy whipped around, his feet planted firmly as he searched for the monster. Thankfully he saw it before it saw him. It was feeding on something. Billy felt like he might be sick at the thought of it hunched over Teddi's body. That horrible, crunching, *wet* sound of it feeding on her corpse.

Billy gripped the liquor bottle tightly in his hand, and he charged forward. He let out a primal scream as he brought the bottle down over the monster's head as hard as he could. The bottle shattered and

the creature screeched again, rearing back from him. It was enough time for Billy to see it was a deer it had been feeding on, and not Teddi. He didn't have time to feel relieved. The Demogorgon had turned and was focused on him now.

He plunged the neck of the broken bottle forward, stabbing it into the monster's side. It let out a horrible noise that made Billy's ears ring. It clawed at him as it fell, just barely missing him. "Billy!" Teddi called behind him. He looked over at her, letting out a shaky, relieved breath when he saw that she was safe.

The Demogorgon wasn't down for the count though. It made a noise, angry and wheezing as it tried to get back on its feet. Billy screamed for Teddi to run. She did. Billy took a few quick strides backwards, making sure the monster hadn't shaken off its injuries and he followed after her. The Demogorgon screeched again. Billy didn't need to look back to know it was chasing after them. Or that the wound had only barely slowed it down.

Teddi's breathing was ragged. Billy could hear her sobs as she ran as fast as she could back to the gate. She didn't dare look back. Johnathan and Nancy were still waiting for them. He could hear them both calling for him and Teddi. Guiding them back to the gate. Teddi dove for the small hole, struggling a little to get through before she was dragged out.

Billy could feel the Demogorgon behind him. He willed his legs to go faster. He had to. There was no way he was going to let himself die this way. To let that thing rip him apart like it had the deer. He had made it about halfway through the gate when it grabbed him. Billy could see Mirkwood. He could see Teddi, Nancy and Johnathan standing above him. The Demogorgon gave his leg a hard yank, and Billy gripped on to the trunk of the tree with all of his strength. He screamed.

Johnathan and Teddi dropped to their knees, each of them grabbing one of Billy's arms and pulling him as hard as they could. Nancy wrapped her arms around Teddi's middle, pulling the blonde back. Billy's free leg kicked blindly at the monster. It didn't do much. The three of them had managed to pull Billy out to his waist. "Give me the bag!" he screamed. Johnathan looked around wildly before he

saw where Billy had dropped his backpack. "The kerosene! Douse the fucking thing, Byers!" he howled.

Nancy had let go of Teddi and taken Billy's other arm. She and Teddi had their feet braced against the tree, playing a terrifying game of tug of war with the Demogorgon. Johnathan sprayed Billy's leg and the monster's hand with the gas. "Teddi, let go," Billy ordered. She didn't. "Let go! I need you to let go!"

Finally Teddi let go of Billy's arm, and he reached down to grab his lighter. The Demogorgon let out a horrible, ear piercing scream as it's arm caught aflame. It's nails dug into Billy's leg, dragging them down and tear at his flesh before finally letting go of him. Billy screamed. For a moment he thought it had ripped his leg off entirely. Johnathan joined Nancy and pulled Billy out to safety. Teddi crawled over to him, pulling his upper half into her lap.

"Oh my god," she gasped. "Billy, your leg. You guys, I don't think he'll be able to walk." she sniffed. The Demogorgon's nails had shredded his jeans. All Teddi could see was red. If she looked closer she could see five deep wounds that would definitely scar.

"Look!" Johnathan exclaimed, pointing back to the tree. The bark was slowly closing over the gateway. The faint, beating red light slowly disappearing.

Teddi let out a relieved sigh. "I have to stop the bleeding. Nancy, there's a first aid kit in my backpack, can you get it for me?" she had her backpack and jacket off already. Nancy moved quickly beside her. Teddi pulled her shirt off over her head. Johnathan looked away quickly. "This isn't gonna feel too great..." she warned Billy. His teeth were clenched, and his breathing was coming out in hoarse growls.

Teddi gingerly took Billy's ankle and lifted his leg, laying the shirt out under him and wrapping it around his leg as tightly as she could manage. Billy let out a loud groan but didn't say anything. Nancy was beside Teddi, the first kit open in front of her. "Unravel the bandage for me? I'm gonna wrap it around his leg." she said, keeping her tight grip on the shirt.

Johnathan shifted nervously above them. "How do you even know

any of this?" he asked.

Teddi shrugged. "Lifeguard," it was only partly a lie. They had been taught basic first aid when she and Billy had started working at the pool. But after patching Billy up more than a few times because of arguments with Neil, Teddi had gotten pretty good at this sort of thing. This was something bigger than just a busted lip or a few bruised ribs, though. Billy could die if she wasn't careful. It was taking everything in her to keep her hands steady and her mind clear. Now wasn't the time to cry.

Nancy helped Teddi wrap the beige bandage around Billy's leg tightly, almost like a mummy. Billy was a trooper through the whole thing. He always was. Teddi leaned down and ripped the bandage, tying it in a tight knot at his ankle. Her hands were covered in his blood. "You're gonna need stitches," she said with a sigh.

"You're not taking me to the hospital, Larsson. How the fuck am I supposed to explain this?"

"Billy, the cuts are too deep to heal on their own! All of this adrenaline is only going to make your heart pump faster and you won't stop bleeding. This is just a bandaid," she pleaded with him. But Billy was too stubborn.

"Well, then you do it. Take me home and stitch them up. We're not going to a goddamn hospital."

"With *what*? Susuan's needlepoint kit? I'm not a fucking doctor!" Billy didn't answer her. His jaw set tightly, and Teddi knew that there would be no convincing him. She let out a frustrated huff. "Do you think you can stand?" she asked. Normally she would let him rest a little. But they didn't have time. There was no telling if the gate would open again and the monster would be back.

Billy nodded, grunting as he sat up slowly. Johnathan hurried to his side, helping him stand while Teddi pulled her puffy jacket back on. The four of them walked silently through Mirkwood and back to Teddi's van. Either they were all still in shock or they were too afraid to speak. Maybe it was a little of both. Billy finally broke the silence once they made it back to the van. Teddi opened the back doors, she

and Johnathan helping Billy to sit. "The hell were you two doing out here anyways?" he asked.

"Johnathan had a picture of Barb," Nancy began. "It was taken right before...Steve ripped it up, but when I taped the pieces back together I saw something in the corner of the frame, by the woods," she explained. "I *knew* Barb would never run away. I think that that thing took her. So we came out here to find her."

"Yeah, well, we think it dragged Will down...wherever the hell we just were." Billy muttered, lighting a cigarette and taking a long drag.

Nancy's wide eyes looked like they were about to fill with tears. "Will is down there? With that monster?"

"We were working on a plan to get him out," Teddi reassured her. "We just needed to find the gate."

Billy smiled thinly, grunting in pain and puffing a cloud of smoke out through his nose. "It's goin' great."

"We'll help!" Johnathan said. "Whatever it takes. If my brother is down there then I'm gonna help get him back. If the four of us work together-" Billy cut him off with a loud groan.

"Can we talk about this some other time? When I'm not bleeding out?"

Teddi nodded. "He's right. I need to get him home. Can we meet up tomorrow? We can think of a game plan. How about at the coffee house tomorrow afternoon?"

"Yeah," Nancy nodded. "We'll be there...thank you, Teddi. For going in after me. You didn't have to do that."

Teddi shifted a little uncomfortably. She smiled awkwardly at Nancy. "Oh, it's no big deal. We gotta look after each other, right?" Teddi helped Billy stand again and the four parted ways. The drive back to Billy's house was quiet aside from a few grunts of pain from Billy every so often. Teddi was gripping tightly onto the steering wheel. What if they couldn't stop the Demogorgon? So far every run in with the monster ended with them almost dying. What if, even after

coming up with a more concrete plan with Johnathan and Nancy, they couldn't get Will and Barb back?

Teddi felt a chill up her spine as she thought of the Upside Down. It wasn't a place that she wanted to go back to. It felt hopeless there. Like you would never be able to escape. There was this constant feeling of something watching you. Making you feel like you would never be *truly* safe. And there was no telling what else lived there. Teddi doubted the Demogorgon was the only threat in the Upside Down.

When they pulled up to Hargrove's house Teddi was surprised and relieved to see that Neil's truck was gone. She couldn't begin to think of a way to explain what had happened to Billy to either him or Susan. And Susan definitely would have insisted on taking Billy to the hospital. Teddi shut the van off and ran around to Billy's side, putting his arm around her shoulder and helping him up to the front porch. She fished his key from his jacket pocket and kicked the door open. "Max! Please tell me you're home!" she yelled into the house.

Billy let out a groan as they made their way inside. He was starting to feel heavy against Teddi's side, and she was getting worried that he might pass out before she could get him to his room. Max ran down the hall and into the living room, her eyes going wide when she saw Billy. "Holy shit! What happened to him?"

"Just help me get him to his room. I'll explain later," Teddi grunted, trying her hardest to keep Billy upright. Max hurried to Billy's other side and the three stumbled towards his room. The girls sat him on his bed, and Teddi did her best to prop his leg up. "Where's Neil and Susan?" she asked Max, hoping to get some idea of how much time she had to fix Billy up.

"Neil took her out because she's all sad about Will," Max rolled her eyes. "They went to dinner and a movie about an hour ago."

"Oh, good...okay, I gotta get your pants off," she stated, her hands on her hips as she assessed the situation.

Billy shot her a tired smirk. The color had drained from his face a little. "Right in front of Max, Larsson? And you say *I'm* the pervert."

Teddi and Max both rolled their eyes. Teddi leaned forward, making quick work of unbuckling Billy's jeans. "Hey, Max? Do you know where your mom keeps her sewing stuff?" Teddi asked as she began to slowly peel Billy's jeans off.

Max shot her a strange look. "Yeah, why?"

"Just go get it for me, please? ...And maybe a beer. Or something stronger," Max didn't ask any questions. She only shrugged and hurried out of the room. Teddi looked down at Billy's leg. Her shirt was completely soaked through with blood and the bandage wasn't far behind. "...This is my fault." she said softly. She could feel tears prickling at her eyes.

"It was not. You had to go in after Nancy. You know, the next time I see that thing I'm knocking it's fucking head off," Billy muttered. His head fell back against the wall, and he let out an uncomfortable groan, shifting a little. "This is gonna fucking suck, isn't it?"

"That's why I told Max to get the beer," Teddi said with a sheepish look. Max came back in with a basket of Susan's sewing supplies and a bottle of Neil's scotch tucked inside. Teddi took in a deep breath, threading a needle. "This totally isn't up to like, medical standards. Are you sure you want me to do this? You could get all infected. Then they'll have to cut your leg off." she knew that it wasn't helping to ramble, but she couldn't help it.

"I'll take my chances." Billy grunted.

Teddi let out another sigh. "Okay...Max, I need you to keep pressure on the other cuts while I stitch him up." she grabbed the bottle of scotch and took a big swig to help steady her nerves.

"Is anyone gonna tell me what happened?" she asked, moving over to Teddi's other side and doing as Teddi told her.

"We found your goddamn gate," Billy huffed. He let out a loud growl like sound, slamming his hand down on his nightstand as Teddi started to stitch up the first cut. She let out a chant of sorrys before handing him the bottle of scotch. He took a long drink. "The two of us got to take a nice trip to the Upside Down and had another run in

with the Demogorgon."

Max's eyes widened as she looked between the two of them. "You found it? You went *through* it? We spent all day looking for it!"

"*What?*" Billy and Teddi both asked.

Max rolled her eyes. "Dustin said something about using a compass to find it. One of their stupid science things. We were going around in circles out in the woods all day, but it turns out El was throwing us off the trail. She got in another big fight with Lucas and Mike and she ran off. Guys can be such *assholes*."

Teddi stopped her work and looked over at Max. "Are you telling me that Eleven is out there in the woods by herself?" she asked. Max shifted uncomfortably and Billy let out a tired sigh.

"I tried to stop her. She wouldn't listen. She just ran off and we haven't seen her since. I'm sure she's fine, Teddi." Max reassured her. Teddi was sure that El could probably take care of herself. So far she'd proven so be extremely self sufficient. But that didn't mean Teddi could just *leave* her out there by herself.

"Can we focus on one problem at a time, Larsson?" Billy asked, his head falling back against the wall.

Teddi turned back to his wounds. On top of everything else that was going wrong, Teddi was beginning to realize that Billy's blood seemed darker now than it had before. He wasn't bleeding as much as he had been in the woods, only a little from her irritating the wounds that were trying to heal. But it looked almost black. "...Are you sure you don't want to go to the hospital? I think something's wrong. I mean, we totally don't know what that thing could've done to you."

"*No hospital*." Teddi realized she could sit there and argue with Billy until she was blue in the face. He wouldn't be budging. Teddi would just have to hope that in the end he would be okay. The stubborn ass.

Eventually Teddi stitched up the five cuts, bandaging Billy's leg once again. When she went to the bathroom to wash her hands she realized they wouldn't stop shaking. None of this was normal. This

was all so far outside of the realm of normal. She had Billy's blood under her fingernails. Because a monster had attacked him in the woods. This was too big for them. Too big for Johnathan and Nancy and the kids. They needed help.

"I think we need to call Hopper." Teddi announced as she walked back into Billy's room.

It was Max that argued with her this time. "You can't! No grown ups. We can't trust any of them. It'll just get El in trouble and Mike will never shut up about. I can't tell you how many times I've had to hear him say snitches get stitches." she said with an eye roll.

Billy let out a humorless chuckle. "Bit late on that end," he joked.

Teddi looked at the two siblings, both of them looking at her with tired expressions. She crossed her arms firmly over her chest, chewing on her lip. Of course there was the chance that Hopper would call someone about El and she would be caught in Hawkins. But there was also the chance that he would help them. She supposed she couldn't really take the chance. Teddi picked up her backpack and fished her keys out.

"Where are you going, Ted?" Billy asked with a tired, low voice.

"I'm gonna go get her," she announced. "I'm gonna find El before someone else does. And don't you fucking argue with me," she pointed a finger at Billy when he opened his mouth. "You have no say in this. You're not getting out of bed. Max, you watch him, okay? If he tries to get out of bed you have my permission to use force." Max grinned over at her brother, who let out a scoff.

Billy sat up and tried to swing his leg off of the bed. He swore loudly and fell back against the wall. "Jesus, fine. Just..."

"I'll be careful," Teddi finished for him. "I promise. I'll be back to check on you after I find her," she leaned over to kiss him, smiling softly. "Love you. Max, take care of him, okay? I'm too lazy to find a new boyfriend." she teased. Billy scoffed again. Teddi didn't miss him mumbling a "love you" out as she turned to leave.

"Wait...did she say *boyfriend*?" she heard Max ask as she made her way down the hall.

xxx

Teddi had been driving around Hawkins for so long that the sun had come up. There was no sign of El so far. Teddi's nerves were absolutely shot. Her eyes and body were begging her for sleep. Not to mention she was still shirtless from the night before. It was like every time she was starting to make a little headway in finding Will something would go horribly wrong and derail everything. And she had definitely had her fill of near death experiences.

She was driving towards Hawkins' main street, instinctively heading towards the police station. Bradley's Big Buy was on the way, and Teddi almost gave herself whiplash as she passed by it. There was a crowd outside of the store. A few of the employees and some customers. They were all crowded around Powell and Callahan. The automatic doors were shattered. "El, what have you gotten yourself into now?" Teddi muttered to herself as she pulled into the parking lot. There was absolutely no way this was a coincidence.

Teddi hopped out of her van and jogged over to the two officers. Powell let out a heavy sigh when he saw her. As much as she and Billy liked to harass the two of them, this wasn't one of those times. "Teddi, we really don't have time-

Teddi held up her hands and shook her head. "This all wouldn't happen to be about a girl in a pink dress would it?" she asked. "About this tall with a shaved head?"

Robert, the store's manager, grumbled loudly. "You mean you know that little thief?"

"...Thief?" Teddi asked, looking over at Powell.

He rolled his eyes. "Apparently she stole some waffles and *somehow* managed to shatter the front doors." Teddi was relieved to see that Powell wasn't really buying that a preteen managed to break two glass doors all on her own.

"Did you see where she went? Any idea?"

"And what's it to you?" Callahan asked, placing his hands on his hips in what Teddi assumed was an attempt to look intimidating.

"...She's my cousin. She's visiting from New York. And I kinda have to find her. Especially if she's stealing shit!"

"Language." Robert said sternly.

Teddi and Powell both rolled their eyes. "A witness said she saw her headed off that way," he jabbed his thumb over towards the neighborhood across the street. A row of houses sat on the edge of the woods, and from there it was a pretty clear shot over to the Byers' place. "Now, I'm gonna let it slide 'cause she's just a kid, but you keep an eye on her, Teddi. If I see any more funny business I'm gonna be taking it up with the chief."

Teddi let out a relieved sigh. "Thank you. I'll find her, don't worry...sorry about the waffles." she apologized to Robert before hurrying off towards her van. She coasted down the road that lead to they Byers' house, her eyes trained on the woods to her left. Eventually she saw a small figure hunched over in the trees a few yards from the house. Teddi pulled her van over and hopped out, rushing over to El's side.

She was crouched down by a fallen tree, covered in dirt and thoughtfully chewing on an eggo. She looked almost shy as Teddi approached her. Teddi kneeled down next to her, catching her breath and placing a hand on El's shoulder. "Are you alright?" El was silent for a moment but eventually nodded. "How come you ran off? It's dangerous out here."

El looked over at Teddi, her large eyes pooling with tears. "I hurt Lucas."

Teddi was surprised. Max hadn't said anything about that. Just that they had gotten into a fight. "...Max didn't tell me that part. So I'm guessing he's probably alright," she reassured her. "How come you kept them away from the gate?"

"You told us to stay away," El said, Teddi smiled softly. "It's dangerous...it's my fault." she sniffed. She wiped her nose roughly with the sleeve of her windbreaker.

Teddi frowned. "What do you mean it's your fault?"

"I opened the gate," El whispered. Teddi could feel her heart begin to beat faster. "Papa..." she sniffed. "Papa made me. I didn't mean to do it. It's my fault that Will is gone."

There were a million different questions running through Teddi's head. And she knew that El probably couldn't answer all or even most of them. "Your papa...is he the one that did all of this to you? Your powers?" El nodded. "El, none of this is your fault, okay? You're just a kid. You're not responsible for whatever it is your papa is up to. But you can help me fix all of this. We can find Will and get rid of the Demogorgon. I *promise*. But first we have to get you out of the woods...and no more eating frozen waffles." she laughed softly, reaching forward and brushing the tears off of El's cheeks. El sniffed and nodded, smiling up at Teddi. Teddi got up to her feet, holding her hand out to help El stand. Teddi put an arm around her and they started their way back to the van.

There was a scream not too far off. Both of the girls stopped in their tracks. Eleven took an instinctive step in front of Teddi. Teddi waited for that horrible screech to follow, but it never came. For the first time it seemed like there was trouble that didn't involve the Demogorgon. Teddi tried to listen a little more closely. There was shouting. Another scream. Teddi and El ran for the van.

Teddi drove in the direction of the quarry. Mike and Max were both cornered by Troy and James. Mike was walking towards the edge of the quarry with no sign of slowing down. "Mike! What the fuck do you think your doing?" Teddi jumped from the van and was running towards the kids.

"Teddi no! He has a knife!" Dustin yelled. Teddi wheeled around, glaring at Troy, who was holding a knife to Dustin's neck. Dustin and Max were both looking up at Teddi with wide eyes. Even James looked scared.

Teddi didn't really waste any time thinking. There wasn't any time to think. There was no way she was going to let a little shit head like Troy Walsh hurt her kids. She punched Troy. Her fist connected directly between his eyes. Dustin brought his foot down hard onto Troy's, letting out a loud battle cry. Troy swore loudly, dropping the knife and backing away from Dustin. His nose was bleeding and he was already crying.

"Mike, stop!" Max screamed, running forward. Teddi whipped around to see that Mike had jumped. She screamed, taking off towards the quarry's edge.

Teddi looked down, her breathing coming out in hoarse gasps. "What the *fuck*?"

Mike was *floating*. He seemed just as surprised as Teddi was. Dustin, Mike, Troy and James had all joined at the edge, the five of them watching in awe as Mike slowly rose back up towards them. He landed behind them with a loud thud. Teddi looked over to see El making her way over, glaring over at Troy.

Suddenly James was thrown to the ground. El moved her head just slightly, and James screamed, grabbing at his arm. "She broke my arm! My arm!" he cried.

"Go." El said, glaring at the two boys. They didn't waste any time. Dustin followed after them, yelling something. Teddi noticed that El was starting to sway back and forth. Her nose was bleeding and her eyes were drooping. She collapsed as Teddi made her way over to her.

"El!" Teddi gasped, dropping to her knees next to her. She reached down to feel for her pulse. It was surprisingly steady. Mike, Dustin and Max ran over, the three of them crowding around the two girls. "El, honey, can you hear me?" Teddi asked, shaking El by the shoulders gently.

"Is she dead?" Dustin asked frantically. Max shoved him, glaring over at her friend.

"She's just passed out. Don't touch her. Just give her a second." she

held her hands out almost to shield El from the three of them.

"El? Can you hear me? Are you okay? El?" Mike asked. After what felt like forever El woke up, immediately bursting into tears. Teddi let out a relieved sigh, pulling her slowly up to a sitting position. El held Teddi's hand tightly as she apologized to Mike, Max and Dustin for opening the gate. Thankfully Mike repeated Teddi's sentiment and told her she had nothing to be sorry for.

"We have to find Lucas." Mike said firmly.

"We will...wait a second. Max, you're supposed to be watching Billy." Teddi said, fixing a stern look in the redhead's direction.

Max shifted nervously. "Steve called and said it was important. I tried to stop him, Teddi, really. But you know how Billy gets. There wasn't really a whole lot I could do."

Teddi pinched the bridge of her nose and let out a heavy sigh. She believed Max. But it didn't make things any less stressful. "Okay...here's what we're gonna do. You guys are gonna take El back to the Wheeler's. I'm gonna go find Billy, and then we're gonna find Lucas *together*. Okay? I don't even wanna think of the crazy shit that's gonna happen if we all split up again. El, are you gonna be okay?"

She nodded. Teddi reached up and wiped the blood from El's nose with her sleeve. "I'll be there soon. Give me at least an hour. Try calling him on the walkies and see if you can reach him. If you can, tell him Teddi says to get his ass over there *immediately*." she pointed her finger at Mike.

"Yeah, yeah. I got it. Just hurry and find Billy, would you? We're running out of time here."

Teddi hurried back to her van and drove back in the direction of main street. The first place she would look for Billy would be Steve's. She was going to kill Billy. What didn't he understand about bed rest?

She didn't make it very far before she saw Steve, up on a ladder and cleaning off the marquee of the Hawk theater. Someone had spray painted "starring Nancy the slut Wheeler" in large red letters under

All the Right Moves. Teddi stomped down on the brakes before getting out of the van once again. "Has the entire fucking town lost their minds?" she asked, walking over to Steve. "What the hell, Harrington? *You* did this?"

Steve looked genuinely ashamed. "...It's a long story." was all he said.

Teddi shook her head. "Tell me about it later. Where's Billy?" Steve's eyes briefly widened before he regained a more neutral expression.

"He's uh...down at the station. Powell and Callahan picked him up. We kinda got into a fight."

Was any of this real? Was this all some sort of insane dream? It had to be. "What do you mean you two got into a fight? What the hell do you have to fight about?"

"...Long story." he repeated with a sheepish smile.

"Jesus Christ. You owe me one hell of an explanation later, Harrington!" she called over her shoulder as she jogged across the street and over to the police station. She burst inside, looking around wildly for Billy. He, Johnathan and Nancy were all seated to her left next to Powell's desk. Johnathan was wearing handcuffs and had a towel of ice pressed against his knuckles "You guys are gonna make me have a fucking anerysm!" she huffed.

"Language, Teddi!" Flo scolded her.

Teddi jumped at her voice, smiling thinly over at the receptionist. "Sorry Flo..." she hurried over to Billy's side. He had a busted lip. His leg was bouncing wildly and his hands were clenched into fists. "Are you okay? I just saw Steve..." she reached over, taking one of Billy's hands in hers. Johnathan and Nancy were watching him with similar sympathetic looks.

"They're gonna call my dad," was all he said. "If he has to come down here..."

Teddi reached over, taking his face in her hands. "Billy, it's gonna be fine. We're gonna wait for Hopper and it's all gonna work itself out. No one's gonna call Neil." his leg didn't stop bouncing.

"Yeah, Billy. I mean you were just trying to help. Hopper will understand." Nancy joined in. Johnathan nodded.

"Don't worry. We'll back you up. It's my fault anyways." Teddi couldn't even begin to think of what could have possibly happened to make Johnathan Byers start a fight. Let alone why Billy would help *him* over his best friend.

"Hey!" Teddi looked over to see Joyce Byers hurrying towards them. Hopper was following close behind her. "Johnathan! Jesus, what happened?" she asked. Callahan stood, trying his best to calm her. "Why is he wearing handcuffs?" she demanded.

"Well, your boy assaulted a police officer, that's why." Callahan explained.

Teddi let out a loud snort. "*Seriously?*" she asked. Hopper shot her a look, and she covered her mouth. "...Sorry."

Joyce and Callahan argued over taking Johnathan's handcuffs off. Eventually Hopper told him to let Johnathan go. Powell walked in, telling Hopper there was something that he needed to show him. Hopper pinched the bridge of his nose, sighing heavily. He turned towards Billy and Teddi pointing at his office door. "You two, wait for me in there. I'll be right back." they didn't need to be told twice.

The pair shuffled off to Hopper's office, Teddi shutting the door behind them.

7. Chapter Seven: It's a Trap!

A/N: Only one chapter to go! I've really enjoyed writing this fic! Would you all be interested in continuing with season two? I'd definitely be drifting from canon, but that's what makes AU fics fun, isn't it?

xxx

Teddi was pacing the length of Hopper's office while she and Billy waited for him to return. Billy had calmed down a little. Now he was watching his girlfriend mutter to herself angrily about something. "...You okay there, Ted?" he asked finally.

"I punched Troy Walsh in the nose." she blurted out.

Billy raised his eyebrows, speechless for a moment before letting out a loud laugh. "*What?*"

"When I found El, Troy had Mike, Dustin and Max out by the quarry and he had a knife to Dustin's friggin' throat. So I punched him. And El broke his arm. You know she can actually move things with her mind? It's *amazing*. *She's amazing*."

"Wait," Billy held his hands up. "That little fucker had a *knife*? And you didn't throw him into the quarry?"

"I was too busy stopping Mike from jumping in."

"*What?!*"

"It's a long story!" Teddi huffed. She plopped down in the seat next to Billy. "They're fine now. I sent them back to Mike's and I was supposed to get you so we can go find Lucas."

"Find Lucas? Where the hell did he go? Who let him run off?"

Teddi rolled her eyes. "If I knew where he went we wouldn't need to find him. And you're one to talk about running off. You have a lot of explaining to do, buddy. Is that your handy work all over Steve's face?"

Billy crossed his arms, not meeting Teddi's eyes. "That was Johnathan." he muttered.

Teddi couldn't help but laugh. "*Johnathan* did that to Steve?"

"He's freakishly strong like you are. Steve called and said he'd gone over to Nancy's last night and he saw her and Johnathan sitting on her bed. So I figured I'd try and explain as best as I could so he wouldn't have a bitch fit, but Tommy got him all worked up and they decided they were gonna graffiti the Hawk. Nancy saw it when her and Johnathan were on the way to meet me and you and they got into a fight." he explained.

"Wow..." Teddi said quietly. "A telepathic preteen opens a portal to another dimension and the town really goes to shit, huh?" Billy let out a chuckle. "Do you agree with me that now we should finally tell Hopper?" she asked, looking over at him.

"Tell me what?" the two teens turned to look at Hopper who was standing in the doorway of his office. He walked in, shutting the door behind him and sitting at his desk. The three of them were quiet as Hopper fixed a stern look in their direction. The two had been on the receiving end of that look more times than they could count. He slapped a photo down onto his desk, sliding it forward. It was the photo Johnathan had taken of Barb. "You two know anything about this?"

Teddi and Billy were silent for a moment. Teddi looked over at Billy, who only sunk down in his seat. She let out a heavy sigh. There was no way they could hide this from him anymore. "It's the Demogorgon. It's what took Will and Barb." she explained.

The look on Hopper's face told her that Johnathan and Nancy had said something similar. "And it lives out in the woods?" he asked. Teddi and Billy both nodded. "So, you two wouldn't happen to know why Johnathan and Nancy have an arsenal in his trunk? The four of you wouldn't be planning on going after this thing? *Again?*" the two teens remained silent. Hopper sighed loudly. "Are you both *insane*? This...*thing*, whatever the hell it is, could have *killed* you. Do you realize that?" his expression softened. "You aren't doing this on your own anymore. Got it? Whatever it is that happened to Barb and Will,

I'm not letting the same thing happen to either of you."

"Hop, Will's *alive*," Teddi argued. "We have to go after it! We know where the gate is now, El can help-"

"El? Who the hell is El?" Hop asked, looking between the two of them.

"Some girl Wheeler found out in the woods. She's got super powers." Billy explained. He almost sounded bored with the situation.

Hopper looked between the two of them, surprisingly accepting of what they were telling him. "...If I hadn't seen some of the *weird* shit I've seen these last few days, I'd be drug testing the two of you right now to make sure you're not on magic mushrooms again," Billy laughed at the memory, clearing his throat when Hopper shot him a stern look. "Is there anything else you two wanna tell me?"

Teddi briefly considered telling him about Troy Walsh. But when she considered everything else happening, some asshole kid was the least of her worries. Besides, it seemed like Troy was going to beat her to the punch. There was a loud argument that had broken out outside of Hopper's office. The three could hear Callahan arguing with a woman, telling her that she needed to calm down. Hopper sighed loudly, heading back out to the station with Teddi and Billy following close behind.

Troy Walsh was there with his mother. His nose was still covered in dried up blood and his arm was now in a sling. When he saw Teddi, he pointed an accusing finger in her direction. "She did it! She punched me in the nose!" he yelled.

Everyone turned to look at Teddi in shock. "You did *what*?" Hopper asked incredulously.

"He...it was self defense!" Teddi argued.

"He's a little boy!" Troy's mother argued, pulling her son protectively to her chest.

"*Yeah*," Troy sniffed. "I didn't do anything to her! Her and her little freak buddies ganged up on me out at the quarry!"

Teddi saw red. She stomped forward, shoving past Hopper and headed right for Troy. "You little *shit stain*! You were going to stab Dustin!" she lunged forward, her hands reaching out for Troy's neck. Billy wrapped his arms around Teddi's middle, lifting her off the ground and pulling her away from Troy as shouting erupted.

"Jesus, Teddi!" Hopper scolded, stepping out in front of Billy with his arms outstretched. "The hell has gotten into you? He's a kid!"

Teddi squirmed in Billy's grip. "He has a knife! He was gonna make Mike jump into the quarry and he was gonna hurt Dustin!" Powell didn't waste any time. He took a hold of Troy's arm, pulling him from his mother as Callahan searched his pockets.

He held up the switchblade with a surprised expression. "Looks like she might be onto something, chief."

Hopper ran a tired hand over his face. "Okay, you five are coming with me," he said, motioning to Teddi, Billy, Johnathan, Nancy and Joyce. "Powell, handle Walsh, will you? I gotta go handle...*all this*."

"Wait a *second*," Troy's mother demanded. "My son's arm is broken! There has to be something you can do!" she argued.

"Yeah! Get that little freak with the shaved head! She can do stuff with her mind, I swear! She's the one that broke my arm!"

Hopper turned to look at Teddi and Billy. "El?" they nodded. "Right, don't worry ma'am. We're gonna handle everything. You just worry about that little delinquent of yours not going to juvie, huh? Let's go, guys." Joyce, Johnathan and Nancy all filed out behind Hopper. Troy stuck his tongue out at Teddi, who kicked her legs wildly at him as Billy carried her past him.

They all piled into Johnathan's car. Teddi, Nancy, Johnathan and Billy were all squished in the backseat. Hopper started the car, he and Joyce turned back to look at them. "Alright, where are the kids now?"

"I told them to wait for me at Mike's," Teddi said. "We're supposed to go look for Lucas. Apparently he decided to go rogue this morning."

she mumbled.

"Isn't it dangerous out there? Why would he go alone?" Joyce asked.

"The Demogorgon only comes out at night," Billy said, shifting uncomfortably when everyone turned to look at him. "I mean, it seems that way at least...it's nocturnal, or whatever."

Hopper nodded. "Alright, so it comes out at night, it's attracted to blood and it doesn't like fire...sounds like my mother in law." Billy was the only one that laughed. Hopper rolled his eyes, driving off in the direction of the Wheeler's place. The four teens filled him and Joyce in on as much as they knew about El, the Upside Down and the Demogorgon. Hopper and Joyce told them they'd figured out the government was in on some sort of cover up plot, and that the body they had found in the quarry wasn't will.

"I *told* you." Teddi said triumphantly, grinning over at Billy.

Billy rolled his eyes, opening his mouth to argue. There was a loud whirring coming from above. Billy rolled down his window and stuck his head out to see what was causing the sound. "Uh, Hop? It's lookin' like we're gonna have a problem." he said, pointing up to the helicopter above them.

Hopper stomped down on the breaks. Everyone lurched forward, the group groaning and complaining at Hopper. He didn't listen. He shut the car off, getting out and hurrying off. The teens followed after him and Joyce tried her best to try and call them back to the car. There were about four black sedans parked out in front of Mike's house. Men in suits were moving back and forth between the sedans and the house, loading boxes of what looked like Mike's belongings.

"I have to go home!" Nancy gasped. Hopper stopped her from running off. "My parents are down there! I have to make sure they're okay!" she argued.

Billy and Teddi looked up to see the helicopter slowly circling the area behind the Wheeler's house. "I don't think they're after your parents," Teddi said, pointing to the helicopter. "I think they're looking for Mike."

"She's right," Hopper agreed. "We still have time. We can't let them know any of us are mixed up in all of this. Everybody get back in the car." he turned, ushering the four teens back to the car.

Billy let out an annoyed huff, reaching down and rubbing at his leg. "Those kids are so dead when we find them. Like the Demogorgon wasn't enough, now we have the man on our ass."

"Where would they be?" Hopper asked. "There's gotta be somewhere they'd be hiding." he looked at Nancy. Her eyes went wide as she tried to think of where Mike and his friends might be. Billy was trying to think himself, coming up empty when he realized he didn't know much about Max's hangout spots aside from the arcade.

"Is there anywhere they might be? Anywhere your parents might not know about?" Joyce asked, looking between the two of them. Neither had an answer.

All eyes went to Teddi. "...What? I don't know *everything* they're always up to," she argued. That was a lie. She let out a sigh. "I mean...I know a few places they might be. But we don't have time to check them all."

"I have an idea," Johnathan offered. "I don't know where they'll be, but I think I know how to ask them where they are,"

They were off to the Byers' house. "Will has a walkie talkie in his room somewhere. We can call Mike. They always keep them close by." Johnathan explained as they headed inside. Nancy, Teddi and Billy all came to a stop when they entered the living room. It was like a tornado had hit. The room was an absolute mess. A hole had been hacked into one of the walls and covered with some wooden planks. Someone had painted the alphabet in thick, black letters above the couch, and there were Christmas like strung up across the ceiling and the walls.

"Whoa...Joyce, the hell happened in here?" Billy asked, turning in a circle as the three of them looked around. Joyce ignored the question. She, Hopper and Johnathan all quickly hurried down the hall and into Will's room. Nancy, Teddi and Billy all shared a look before following them.

It didn't take Joyce long to find the walkie talkie. Everyone crowded into Will's room. Billy plopped down onto his bed, rubbing at his leg with a painful groan while Joyce fussed over him and asked if he was alright. Nancy turned the walkie talkie nervously in her hands a few times before attempting to call Mike.

There was no answer. It felt like everyone was holding their breath as they waited to see if Nancy could get through to her brother. "...Maybe they don't have a walkie," Billy offered. "You want me to try?"

Johnathan laughed. "Yeah, like they wouldn't be too scared to answer you," Billy let out a grumble, shooting a dirty look in Johnathan's direction. "Let Teddi try. She's been in on this with them. She's the only one they know won't rat them out."

"Technically speaking I *am* ratting them out," she argued. Hopper shot her a look, taking the walkie from Nancy and handing it to Teddi. "...I'm just saying," she let out a sigh. "Mike? El? Are you guys there? It's me, Teddi. We saw the creepy government guys at Mike's. Hopper's here. We can help. I promise." There was another long stretch of silence. Maybe Billy was right. Maybe they didn't have a walkie with them.

There was a bit of static from the walkie. "I copy. It's Mike. I'm here, we're all here."

Hopper took the walkie from Teddi. "Mike, it's Hopper. Where are you? I'm coming to get you out of there." they were at the junkyard. "Junkyard?" Hopper asked, looking back at the teens.

"It's out by the train tracks," Billy said. "We used to hide in the bus and smok-...forget it. I can show you how to get there." he got up, grunting a little when he stood on his leg. Joyce and Teddi both reached out for him.

"Honey, you need to sit down," Joyce said softly. "I'm gonna go get the first aid kit." she got up, hurrying off down the hall.

"I'm gonna go by myself," Hopper said to Billy. "You sit tight here, I'll get the kids. I don't want any of you leaving, got it? We need to stick

together." the four teens nodded. Hopper gave them one last look before following after Joyce.

Teddi turned to Billy with a worried look. "Can I see?" Billy nodded, leaning back on his elbows and groaning. Teddi and Nancy kneeled down in front of Billy. Nancy held his ankle gingerly as Teddi rolled his jeans up. She sucked in air when she saw the five large cuts. His stitches weren't visible anymore. It was like somehow they had healed overnight, but now five black, vein like scars ran up his leg.

Teddi was speechless. She and Nancy shared a look, neither of them knowing what to say. Teddi reached out carefully, softly running her finger down one of the scars that ran directly down his shin. "...Does it hurt?" she asked, looking up at him.

Billy shook his head. "Not that. It hurts inside. Like my skin's on fire."

"...Is that normal?" Nancy asked Teddi.

She shook her head. "No, but then nothing around here is normal anymore," she sighed. She looked at Billy's leg helplessly. The skin around the scars was beginning to turn a dull grey color. Like the scars were literally sucking the life out of him. "Billy, I really think we need to take you to a doctor. This is-

Billy slammed his fist down onto the bed beside him, fixing a snarl in Teddi's direction. "*I said no fucking doctors!*" he growled out. Teddi and Nancy both jumped. Johnathan shifted nervously, inching his way towards the girls. Teddi's eyes met with Billy's, and she was shocked to see pure hatred there.

Johnathan gently touched Teddi's shouder. "Come on, let's leave him alone for a minute, huh?" he suggested quietly. He and Nancy both helped Teddi stand. She couldn't look away from Billy. Her heart was hammering in her chest. Something was very, *very* wrong. Nancy led Teddi outside and to the porch. They sat on the porch swing, neither of them saying anything.

"...Does he usually snap at you like that?" Nancy finally asked.

Teddi pulled her knees up to her chest and shook her head. "Never. I

mean, he's always been sort of an asshole, but *that...*" she let out a shaky breath. "All of this has me really scared, Nance." She confessed.

"Me too. But it's gonna be okay, Teddi. Billy is gonna get better, and we're gonna find Will and Barb and hopefully everything will go back to normal." they both knew that Nancy was trying to convince herself of that as well. There was no guarantee that things would have a happy ending.

"...Are you gonna break up with Steve?" Teddi asked.

Nancy looked off, laughing a little like she had already forgotten about that afternoon. "I don't know...I don't know what to do anymore. I know that wasn't like him, but..."

"But you like Johnathan," Teddi finished for her. Nancy flashed her a sheepish smile. "I know that we aren't super close, but can I give you some advice?" Nancy nodded, turning towards Teddi. "Steve has no idea that any of this is happening. He doesn't know there's a monster in the woods, or about the Upside Down. You went to Johnathan and asked him to be your partner in all of this. I think that says a lot. Like, with me and Billy...he's the first person I go to with anything. Even if I know he'll look at me like I'm insane. He always listens and he always helps."

"That's 'cause I know you'd do the same for me," the two girls jumped at the sound of Billy's voice. He looked better already. Normal. He shifted nervously in the doorway. "...You mind if I talk to her for a sec, Nance?" Nancy looked over at Teddi who nodded before she headed inside. Billy didn't miss the glare she shot in his direction before she disappeared. Billy walked over to Teddi, limping a bit, and sat down on the swing next to her. He kicked his foot just a little, making the seat swing. "...We should get one of these."

Teddi raised an eyebrow. "A porch swing?"

"Yeah. When we figure out where we wanna go..." Billy let out a sigh. "Look, Ted...I'm sorry about what happened..."

"What *did* happen?"

Billy ran a hand over his face. He looked like he hadn't slept in a week. "I don't know. I feel like I feel fine most of the time, and then..." Teddi thought back to the look of hatred he had given her. "It hurts. Like I'm burning from the inside out and there's something trying to get *out* of me. And then I just get *angry*."

Teddi didn't know what to say. She was scared for him. Even if she could convince him to see a doctor, how could they help? She took his hand in hers, squeezing it a little. "It's all gonna be fine," she said, repeating Nancy's lie. "We'll figure it out...but if you snap at me like that again I'm kicking you in the balls."

Billy laughed, putting his arm around her. "Deal."

It was dark when Hopper's Blazer finally pulled up in front of the Byers' house. Teddi and Billy got up from the porch swing quickly as the kids filed out of the car. Joyce, Nancy and Johnathan joined them on the porch. Nancy ran forward to wrap Mike in a hug he definitely hadn't been expecting. Max hugged Billy tightly. He patted her back awkwardly, trying to crack a joke with her to break the tension.

El watched her two friends, hugging their siblings, with a curious expression. Her eyes met Teddi's, who was standing on the porch, offering her a soft smile and a sort of awkward wave. El made her way over to the blonde, hugging her tightly.

Billy watched the two girls, wrapping an arm around Max's shoulder. Maybe he was being a dick about the El situation. Teddi didn't have someone like he had Max. She was a pain in the ass, and she was constantly getting him into trouble, but she was his family. His sister. Teddi was the kind of girl that wanted to take care of everyone around her. Was it really so wrong for him to let her take care of El?

Teddi let out a small laugh, returning the hug fiercely. "You okay, Ellie Bean?"

El nodded, smiling softly at her. "Safe."

"I'll always keep you safe. I promise." she ran a hand over El's hair. Teddi caught the way that Hopper was watching them. He looked like Billy. Like he disapproved of Teddi getting so close. She didn't

care.

Hopper ushered everyone back inside, and Mike and the party gave Hop, Joyce, Nancy and Johnathan a crash course in the Upside Down. Mike explained how El could make contact with Will, sort of like a long distance phone call. El agreed to try again with one of the walkies to see if she could make contact with Will or Barb. If they could reach either of them then maybe it could help them in their rescue mission.

They crowded around El at the dinner table and watched as El tried to make contact. Not a lot happened. Eleven stared down at the walkie talkie, focusing all of her energy on it. The walkie came to life, crackling and letting out some static. Joyce sucked in a breath next to Teddi. There was a loud whir through the house. The lights flickered, and there was a loud pop before they cut out.

El sat up, her expression falling into a sad frown as the lights came back on. "...I'm sorry. I can't reach them." her eyes were pooling with tears. Billy reached over, placing a comforting hand on her shoulder. El looked up at him, sniffing.

"Don't worry about it, kid. We'll figure something else out," he reassured her. El smiled thinly at him, pushing herself away from the table and heading for the bathroom. Teddi sighed. "So...what now? Does she need a bigger radio again? What about the one at your school?"

Mike shook his head. "She's tired. We have to give her time to rest-"

"We don't *have* time. We have people looking for her. We don't know how much longer Will and Barb can survive...*wherever* it is they are." Hopper argued.

"We don't know what'll happen to her if we force her to push herself," Teddi argued. "Her nose bleeds every time she uses her powers. It's wearing on her. I'm not gonna let her hurt herself because you can't be patient." she firmly crossed her arms, glaring up at Hopper.

"Teddi," he sighed. "I know that you wanna help her. I get it. But-"

"I can call them in the pool." it was El. The group turned to face her. Her eyes were a little red, Teddi guessed she'd been crying in the bathroom.

"Pool? Finally, something we can help with." Billy grinned, throwing his arm around Teddi.

Hopper rolled his eyes. "Not that kind of pool, Billy. It's a deprivation tank. I saw one in that lab out in the woods. How in the hell are we supposed to make one of those?"

Dustin called their science teacher. They drove to the middle school, Hopper breaking them up into teams and giving them all jobs. Teddi and Billy would help Dustin and Lucas help set up the pool. Which mostly meant Teddi and Lucas stood by, arms crossed over their chests as they watched Billy and Dustin screaming at each other from across the small pool they'd borrowed from Joyce.

"You're not doing it right, Henderson! Pull it!"

"I am pulling it! I thought you were supposed to be strong!"

After about twenty minutes and Billy deciding he was going to give Dustin the silent treatment, Lucas and Teddi managed to set the pool up without much of an issue. Billy walked off to pout on the bleachers. Once the pool was ready for El, the gang crowded around her, just like they had at the Byers' and waited. Teddi and Joyce were knelt down next to her, arms ready to reach out to El if anything went wrong.

The lights flickered again. The whole gym sounded like it was groaning under the weight of El's powers. It echoed through the large room, making goosebumps appear on Teddi's arms. Suddenly it was quiet. Like somehow they were in the tank with her. Teddi wondered what El saw when she called out to the Upside Down. Or if she saw anything at all.

El called out for Barb. Nancy let out a small gasp. The lights flickered again. El started breathing heavily, her body looked like it was trying to fight against something. "Is she okay? Is Barb okay?" Nancy asked.

El was crying. Thrashing. Teddi and Joyce reached out, grabbing on to El's hands as she started chanting the word *gone*, her cries getting more and more urgent. Teddi pulled El over towards her, her hands wrapping around El's tiny hand. She was surprised when Billy placed a hand over her own, anchoring El close to them as they tried to quiet her. "El? Can you hear me? It's okay. We're here. I'm gonna keep you safe, remember? We all will. We're all right here with you." Teddi assured her.

Eventually El stilled again. Joyce, Teddi and Billy kept their hold on her as she continued on. "Castle Byers..." she said quietly. "Will..."

Everyone let out a breath at once at the sound of El saying Will's name. Joyce's eyes were filled with tears as she gripped onto El's hand like her life depended on it, telling her to let Will know they were going to save him. El repeated each message quietly, her voice becoming more desperate by the second. Teddi could just briefly hear Will's voice over the walkie that was sitting nearby as he answered El. El was thrashing again, screaming Will's name. The lights in the gym flashed wildly before there was a loud pop and the room went dark.

El screamed, sitting up with a loud gasp. The lights came back on. Billy wrapped his arm around her, pulling her to the edge of the pool to try and stop her thrashing. "It's okay, kid. I got you. You're okay." he mumbled. El cried into his chest, her tiny hands clutching onto him like she would be dragged away if she let go.

Teddi slid over to them, reaching out and wiping the blood from El's nose. Hopper was up and putting his coat back on, Joyce was close behind him. "You did so good, El. We know where Will is. You did it. We can save him." Teddi ran her hand over El's hair, smiling down at her.

Max hurried over with a large beach towel. Billy helped El stand before Max wrapped the towel around her. Billy placed a hand on her back, leading her over to the bleachers where the boys were waiting. He kneeled down in front of her. "You doin' okay?" he asked. El nodded, but just barely. He looked back at Teddi. "You wanna go get her a Coke or something? She's looking a little pale."

"Jeez, you guys take this lifeguard thing seriously, huh?" Mike asked. Billy and Teddi both shot him similar, unimpressed looks.

"I'll be right back," Teddi muttered, hurrying out of the gym and into the halls of the middle school. She didn't make it very far before she ran into Nancy and Johnathan. They were sitting on the floor beside each other, the both of them going quiet when they saw Teddi approaching. "...Am I interrupting something?" she asked.

"No." Johnathan said quickly.

"Yes," Nancy argued. She stood, glaring down at Johnathan. "Teddi, Hopper and Joyce are headed right into a trap. We can't just sit here and do nothing. They'll get killed. And Will won't be far behind."

"Wait," Teddi held up her hands. "They're going through the gate? Alone?" she asked. Johnathan sighed and nodded. "And you just *let* them?"

Johnathan let out a huff. "Have you ever tried to get Hopper to do something he doesn't want to do? I don't exactly have much sway here, Teddi." he argued.

Teddi shook her head. "This is insane, Johnathan! They don't know how to stop that thing."

"*Exactly!* Listen, I have a plan. We can kill the Demogorgon. But I need your help. And Billy. The kids can stay here and let El rest. It'll be safe here. No one will find them. But we need to go. *Now.*"

Teddi didn't need to think it over. She nodded. "Okay. Okay, I'll go get Billy."

"Meet us at the Byers'...bring more hairspray." Nancy took Johnathan by the hand and pulled him off towards the exit. Teddi rushed down the hall to one of the vending machines. She pushed the button repeatedly, praying for the machine to move faster. Once it dropped the can of soda she was down the hall and back into the gym in record time.

"Billy, we need to leave. Mike, I'm leaving you in charge, okay? None of you are leaving this gym. No matter what happens. Got it? El

needs to rest. We'll handle everything else," she pressed the can of soda into El's hands. "We'll be back soon. This is all gonna be over soon." she assured her.

Billy was blinking wildly. "Wait, wait, wait. Teddi, what the hell are you talking about? Where the hell are we going? What's gonna be over soon?"

Teddi rolled her eyes, like it was the most obvious thing in the world. "We're going to kill a Demogorgon."

8. Chapter Eight: The Babysitters Club

A/N: Here it is! The final chapter! It's a long one so buckle up y'all. I had so much fun writing this fic! I'm definitely setting up for a sequel if you guys are interested! Hope you enjoy!

xxx

"So, Nancy has a plan to kill the Demogorgon?" Billy asked. He and Teddi were in the Camaro, speeding through the streets of Hawkins.

"Apparently." Teddi answered.

"But you don't know what it is?"

"I do not."

Billy sighed, laughing dryly. "Well that's just great." he was getting anxious. Teddi could easily tell from the way his shoulders were getting all tense and the way he was gripping onto the steering wheel so tightly it looked like it might snap. She reached over, placing a hand on his knee.

"Billy, it's gonna be okay. It's Nancy we're talking about here. She's got her shit together better than me, you and Johnathan all put together," she joked. Billy's jaw clenched. Teddi let out a soft sigh, letting a silence fill the car. She let her mind drift back to the kids who were waiting for them back at the gym. Hopefully this nightmare would end soon. Hopefully Will would be back home soon and they could all go back to being kids.

She was still surprised that Billy had been so comforting with El. It was like a switch had been flipped inside him. Something had made him go from the big, bad Billy Hargrove he wanted everyone to see to the guy she'd fallen in love with. "...It was really sweet what you did earlier. With El." Teddi said finally.

Billy shifted in his seat awkwardly. "It was nothing."

"It wasn't though. You made her feel safe. I really appreciated it," Billy shrugged, trying to keep himself from smiling. Teddi turned to

him. She took one of his hands from the steering wheel, linking their fingers together. "Sometimes it's crazy how much I love you, Billy Hargrove."

Billy smiled then, bringing their hands to his lips and pressing a kiss to Teddi's knuckles. "Took the words right outta my mouth, Teddi Larsson," he mumbled against her fingers. Teddi smiled, feeling almost embarrassed at how utterly cheesy she'd allowed herself to be. Billy's other hand had eased up on the steering wheel. "You know...maybe you were right."

Teddi raised an eyebrow. "I probably was, but about what?" she asked with a small laugh.

"El," he answered. "You know...about her staying here. Maybe that is what's best for her."

Teddi was definitely shocked. "What happened to-"

"That was before," Billy cut her off, shaking his head. "Before all of this crazy shit happened. Before I saw what she could actually do...besides, she's like us, you know?"

Teddi frowned over at him. "What do you mean?"

"You know...she got the shitty end of the stick when it came to parents. Her dad doing all of those experiments, locking her in the closet-" Teddi pulled her hand away from him. Billy looked over at her quickly before looking back at the road. "What?" he asked. Teddi didn't answer. She was too shocked. And confused.

Her back was pressed up against the door, almost like she couldn't get far enough away from him. "How do you even know any of that?" she finally asked.

Billy was quiet. He was gripping the steering wheel tightly again. "...I don't know," he said coldly, letting out a dry laugh. "You probably told me earlier or something and I just forgot. What's the big deal, Teddi? Why are you looking at me like that?"

Teddi definitely hadn't told Billy anything that El had shared with her in the woods. She wasn't even sure if *Mike* knew about El's 'Papa'.

And she hadn't remembered El saying anything about him locking her in a closet. "...Nothing. You're right. I must've told you when we were at the Byers' or something," she lied. She moved back into her seat, trying to make her body loosen up a little and her heart slow down. Her eyes flicked over to Billy's leg instinctively. What had *happened* to him in the Upside Down?

Billy was frowning out at the road in front of him. He looked as confused as Teddi felt. She couldn't help but wonder if he knew himself how he'd known anything about El and her life before Hawkins. There was a brief moment when Teddi saw a look of fear on his face. It was gone as quickly as it had come. Billy shifted in his seat again, looking over at her quickly. "...Where exactly am I going?" he asked.

Teddi swallowed thickly. Her mouth felt dry. "Um, we can stop at my house. My dad has some stuff we can probably use," she hated the horrible silence that filled the Camaro. She hated that she didn't know what to say to Billy when it was obvious that he was so scared. Teddi could only reach over, taking Billy's hand in hers once again. He looked over at her, smiling thinly before squeezing her hand.

Neither of them spoke until Billy had pulled into Teddi's driveway and she had opened the garage door. "...Why the hell does your dad have so many machetes and shit?" Billy asked, taking one of the machetes off of its spot on the wall and turning it in his hand. Teddi had grabbed a duffle bag and was filling it with anything she thought could help with Nancy's plan.

"That's definitely not a door I wanna open. I'm actually pretty sure he killed a guy and buried him in our backyard when I was six," Teddi had said it so calmly Billy wasn't entirely sure if she was kidding or not. "Can you use a gun?" she asked.

"Wha- he has guns? Is your dad the fuckin' Punisher?" Teddi walked over to her father's workbench, kneeling down and pulling one of the cabinets open.

"Of course he has guns. This is the only one he doesn't have locked up in the house though," Teddi pulled out a rifle, holding it out to Billy as she reached back into the cabinet for a box of ammunition. "It's his

hunting rifle. He like never uses it so we can take it."

Billy wordlessly took the rifle from her, slinging it onto his back. George Larsson was officially the scariest guy he'd ever met.

"Uh...guys?" Teddi and Billy both spun around. Steve was standing in the driveway, his eyes a little wide. He gave them an awkward wave. "...Can we uh...can we talk?" Billy and Teddi both gave each other a look. Steve walked further into the garage, passing a glance at the duffle bag full of weapons. He shoved his hands into the pockets of his jeans. "...Whatcha guys up to?"

Billy and Teddi looked at each other again. "...Billy's house has a rat problem." Teddi finally said.

Billy nodded. "Big rats. *Huge*. They'll try to rip your leg right off-" he cleared his throat when Teddi elbowed him in the side.

"...And you need a hunting rifle?" Steve asked, looking between the two. "For rats?" it was a weak lie. They both knew it. But what else could they possibly tell Steve? The truth? He'd think they'd lost their minds. Steve held up his hands, shaking his head. "Forget it...I just wanted to apologize for what happened earlier with Byers and all. I was a dick."

"I'll say." Billy agreed. Teddi elbowed him again.

Steve let out a small, awkward laugh. "Yeah...look, I don't want this to get between us, man. It was stupid. It was my business with Nancy...I just feel like you guys haven't been around much. I kinda didn't know who else to call but Tommy..."

Teddi's heart ached for Steve. She knew that she and Billy had been shitty friends lately. It wasn't like they were doing it for no reason, but to Steve it probably looked like they were trying to avoid him. "I'm really sorry Steve. We've just got a lot of..."

"Couple stuff?" Steve asked. Teddi shifted uncomfortably. "With rats?" the two couldn't make eye contact with him. Steve let out a sigh, nodding. "I get it. I'll see you guys around." he turned, sulking as he walked off.

Teddi called after him, but he didn't stop. "Let him go, Ted. We'll fix things with him later. We gotta get to the Byers," Billy set a comforting hand on her lower back. Teddi knew he was right. There were bigger issues they needed to deal with. Steve could wait.

They loaded their supplies into the back of the Camaro. Teddi made sure to grab the first aid kit from her van. "You need to swing by my place and grab Susan's sewing kit?" it was a joke. Teddi knew it was a joke. Billy was just trying to lighten the mood. But it just made her think back to when she had been stitching his leg back together, her and Max's hands both covered in his almost black blood. She felt sick.

"...Let's just get this over with." she mumbled, slamming the trunk shut and sliding into the passenger's seat. The drive was silent again. Billy didn't bother to turn on the radio. That thick, horrible silence fell between them and they were both too unsure of what to say. Teddi had the morbid thought that this might be the last time she and Billy might ever be alone again. Tonight might be the last time she ever saw him. Her hands wouldn't stop shaking.

When they pulled up in front of the Byers' house, Billy was the first one to speak. He turned to her, linking their fingers together like she had earlier that night. Teddi didn't dare look away from him. "...You and me till the end. Right?"

Teddi let out an uneasy breath, nodding. "Till the end." More silence. Billy leaned in, holding Teddi close against him as he kissed her. She didn't want to let go. She didn't want to go inside and fight that monster again. But they didn't have a choice.

They pulled away from each other, wordlessly sliding out of the Camaro and heading around to the trunk of the car. Billy let out a hiss as he pulled the duffle bag out, reaching down for his leg. "Are you okay?" Teddi asked with wide eyes.

As fast as it had come, the pain was gone. Billy gritted his teeth, standing upright and nodding. Teddi gave him one last look before heading inside. Nancy and Johnathan were in the living room, sitting out the couch and bandaging up their hands. They both looked towards the door as Teddi and Billy walked in. "...I'm not doing any blood brother shit with you guys." Billy deadpanned.

Teddi and Nancy both rolled their eyes. "We were trying to lure it in. It's attracted to the smell of blood..." Nancy explained. Teddi looked around the living room to see that in the short amount of time they'd been apart, Nancy and Johnathan had turned the Byers' house into a warzone. "We set up a trap," Nancy pointed to the trail of bear traps that lead to Will's room. "We call it and let it chase us to Will's room and then we set it on fire."

"We should start letting you coach the basketball team," Billy joked. "So...what now? The blood didn't work. How do we know when this thing is gonna show?"

"My mom says the lights speak. Blink when it's near. Like an alarm." Johnathan said.

Teddi dropped the duffle bag onto the coffee table. "Well, I guess we wait then-" she pulled out the machete that she'd tucked inside earlier, the four of them jumping when someone started to pound on the door. They sprung into action, each holding their weapon of choice up, ready to defend each other.

"C-can it knock?" Billy asked.

More pounding on the door. "Guys! I know you're in there, okay? The Camaro's outside- can you let me in?" Teddi let out a groan. *Steve*. Teddi marched over to the door, opening it just a crack. Steve shoved his face inside, trying to push the door open completely. "Can someone tell me what the hell is going on? ...Uh, Ted? Why do you have a machete?"

"Did you *follow* us, Steve?" she asked.

"...I may have."

"Steve, you can't be here! Go home!" Nancy ordered, stomping over to help Teddi shut him out.

"Nanc- what the hell is happening? Let me in! You guys are really freaking me out, okay? This is all getting just *way* too fucking weird. You've all got an arsenal, and you're hanging out with *Johnathan Byers*. We're friends, okay? And friends tell each other shit. Even

when that shit includes machetes. *So let me in!*" he shoved the door open, only to have Nancy push him roughly against it and point her gun in his direction. "Jesus, Nancy!" he yelped.

"I'm serious, Steve!" Nancy's thumb cocked the small pistol before she pointed it at him again. "You need to go!"

Teddi gave Nancy's arm a soft tug. "Nance, just leave him-" the lights above them started flickering. They twinkled and blinked wildly. The entire house groaned loudly, warning them of what was coming. Nancy pulled away from Steve. Billy let out a scream. He doubled over, grabbing at his leg.

"It's coming!" Johnathan cried. Teddi, Nancy, Billy and Johnathan gathered in the center of the room, pressing their backs to each other as they watched for any sign of the Demogorgon.

"What? *What's* coming? Can someone *please* tell me what the fu- *oh my god!*" Steve jumped backwards as the ceiling above them started to crumble and crack. Teddi's skin erupted in goosebumps when she heard that horrible screech. The Demogorgon was crawling out from above them.

"Run! To Will's room! Go!" Johnathan ordered. He lead the pack. Nancy and Teddi followed closely behind him, taking great care to jump over the bear traps that littered the hallway. Steve was too afraid to move.

Billy grabbed him roughly by the arm, shoving him hard in Teddi's direction. "He said run, Harrington!" he barked. Steve ran. The five teens all huddled into Will's room, Billy slamming the door shut behind him and shoving his weight against it. He was breathing hard. Harder than the rest of them. It was coming out in harsh growls through his teeth.

"Is it...I don't hear anything," Nancy said quietly. "Is it gone?" she looked over at Johnathan.

"Where the hell could it have gone?" Teddi asked. Billy pushed away from the door, his breathing steady. "Are you okay? What happened?" she reached out for him.

Billy pulled away. "Nothing- I don't know," he huffed. "That thing showed up and...*I don't know.*" silence filled the room.

"...*What was that thing?*" Steve asked.

"A Demogorgon." Teddi, Nancy, Johnathan and Billy all answered.

Steve blinked a few times, his chest rising and falling quickly. "Oh! Of course. A Demog- I'm getting the hell out of here!" he sprung for the door, yanking it open before any of them could stop him. Steve poked his head out into the hall, making sure the monster was gone before he ran out to the living room. "This is crazy! Do any of you see how crazy this is? We have to call someone!" he reached for the phone.

Nancy stopped him. "Steve, we don't have anyone to call! That thing is going to come back! You need to leave before you get yourself hurt." Steve looked over to Billy and Teddi. Neither of them said anything. Steve swallowed loudly, running for the front door. No one stopped him.

"It just...disappeared?" Teddi asked quietly, looking over at Billy. The lights were blinking again. Billy screamed out in pain. Then the lights went out completely. Teddi gripped onto the machete in her hands hard. She couldn't see anything. All she could hear was her friends' harsh breathing mixed in with her own.

"...Where is it?" Johnathan asked.

The Demogorgon purred. Like it had when it had been hunting her in the Upside Down. It screamed again. Johnathan was on the ground before any of them could do anything. His bat flew from his hands as he reached out to defend himself from the Demogorgon's claws. Nancy shot at it. Teddi thought she had to have hit it at least once, because it let out the same pained scream that it had when Billy had stabbed it.

"Move!" someone called from behind them. It was Steve. He picked up the bat that Johnathan had dropped, hitting the Demogorgon upside its head. It screeched, pulling away from Johnathan. Billy scrambled to help Johnathan up. Steve hit the monster again, backing away from it to lure it from the other's. "Come on ya ugly bastard.

Come get some-" he hit it again.

The Demogorgon lunged for Steve. It was slower now that it was wounded. Steve jumped out of its path, shoving Nancy and Teddi further away from the creature as he went. The Demogorgon's foot landed in one of the bear traps. It screamed again. Teddi jumped for the coffee table. She pulled the lid from the bottle of kerosene she'd pulled from her bag, tossing it at the monster before lighting her little black lighter and throwing it.

It let out a noise that was unlike anything Teddi had ever heard as it burst into flames. The teens all clamped their hands over their ears, wincing at the scream the Demogorgon was letting out as it burned. Johnathan ran to the kitchen, grabbing the fire extinguisher. All that was left of the monster was a charred, slimy, black puddle.

"...Is it dead?" Nancy asked.

"It has to be," Billy coughed, waving the cloud of smoke out of his face. "The scars don't hurt...we did it? It's over?"

"It's over." Johnathan nodded. The lights came back on. The five teens all let out loud sighs of relief. Teddi fell against the wall, breathing in deeply to try and steady her nerves. *It was over.*

Steve was bent over, his hands resting on his knees. "...Uh, guys? Is that...is that it?" he was pointing up towards the lights. Teddi's stomach lurched.

The lights were blinking, but it was different this time. It started at the end of the hallway, by Will's room. The lights blinked, travelling closer towards them. The house didn't groan. Billy didn't scream. "...I don't think that's the monster." Nancy said quietly as the five of them watched on in awe.

Johnathan stepped forward, following the lights out to the front porch. The group followed after him. The porch light flickered. "...Mom?" Johnathan asked quietly.

Teddi heard a voice. A small whisper of something she couldn't quite hear. "Are they there? In the Upside Down?" Teddi asked. No one

answered. The five of them stood there for what felt like forever.

"...What do we do now?" Nancy asked.

Billy ran a tired hand down his face. "The kids. We need to get back to the school."

"Shit!" Teddi hissed. "We have to get back to the kids! They're still waiting for us!" they all piled into the Camaro. Billy sped through the streets, driving back to Hawkins' Middle as fast as his baby could take them. They did their best to fill Steve in on everything during the drive. He was taking it fairly well.

When they finally arrived at the school, Teddi's stomach dropped. "Oh my god. *Oh my god*. What the hell happened?" the same sedans that they had seen at the Wheeler's were parked outside of the gym along with two large army trucks. Next to it was an ambulance, a fire truck and two patrol cruisers.

Teddi was out of the car before Billy could pull it to a complete stop. "Mike!" she yelled, running over to the ambulance where Mike was sitting with a blanket wrapped around him. She hugged him tightly. "What happened? Are you okay? Where are the others? Are Hopper and Joyce back?"

Mike looked up at her, his eyes pooling with tears. "They came for us. I don't know how they knew we were here. The Demogorgon- El-"

Teddi could only stare at him. She pulled away. "What about them?"

"Billy!" Max came running over towards her brother, Lucas and Dustin following after her. Max hugged her brother tightly. Billy was stunned for a moment, a small grin appearing on his face before he hugged her back. Nancy rushed over to Mike's side, pulling him into a hug. Mike returned the hug this time around.

Teddi looked around wildly for any sign of El nearby. "Mike...*where is Eleven?*" Teddi asked.

"She sacrificed herself." Lucas answered quietly.

"The Demogorgon was gonna get us. She stopped it." Dustin added.

It felt like time had stopped. Teddi's mouth opened a closed a few times. A large lump had grown in her throat, and her eyes were stinging with the threat of tears. "What...what do you *mean* she sacrificed herself? She's gone?" the two boys couldn't meet her eyes. "She can't be *gone*. She couldn't have just disappeared into fucking thin air!" she spat, tears flowing freely now.

"Teddi..." it was Billy. His hand was on her back.

"Don't touch me!" she pulled away from him. "She can't be *gone*, Billy. I told her that I would keep her safe. I set that fucking thing on fire! You saw it! I *promised* her, Billy. I told her that nothing bad was going to happen-" Teddi was sobbing now. It sounded like she was choking on every word she said. It felt like she couldn't breathe properly. Her lungs were burning from the cold air. "What am I supposed to do now? How do I get her back?"

If Billy hadn't been there to hold her upright, Teddi would've collapsed to the ground. He held her tightly as she struggled to break free from him. He'd never seen her cry like this. "You can't, Teddi. *You can't*. She's gone." he said quietly.

"I promised her." Teddi sobbed into his chest.

"I know. I know you did."

"...This is my fault." she said quietly. "I left them. I didn't kill the Demogorgon-"

"Will you stop it?" Billy pulled away from her, his hands gripping her shoulders. "This isn't your fault. None of this is your fault. She knows that you did everything you could, Teddi." Billy felt helpless as Teddi cried into his shoulder. What was there for him to say? How could he make something like this better? El was gone. He and Teddi wouldn't see her again. She had been so close to finally getting a normal life. Billy almost wished he could trade places with her. Anything to make Teddi stop crying.

"Everyone doing okay?" it was Powell. The look on his face said he knew it was a stupid question. He shifted awkwardly, not meeting the eyes of the kids in front of him. "I got a call from the chief. They

found Will. He says you all can head on over to the hospital and see him."

"Will's back?" Johnathan asked. "Is he alright?"

"He's a little shaken up, but chief says he's fine. They just wanna keep him for observation. I can give some of you a ride if you need it."

"You hear that, Ted?" Billy asked. "Will's safe. You wanna go see him?" she didn't say anything. Teddi only nodded, sniffing loudly. Steve rode with them to the hospital. He sat in the backseat with Teddi. Teddi was tucked up against his side, Steve's arms wrapped tightly around her as she cried. Billy watched them through the rearview mirror. *They look awful cozy*, a voice in his head hissed. *She didn't even want you to touch her...Steve looked awfully upset earlier tonight. Couple Stuff. Jealous even.*

Billy's scars were throbbing. He looked into the mirror again. Steve was running a comforting hand over Teddi's hair, whispering something Billy couldn't quite hear. He gripped the steering wheel hard. His knuckles turned white. His foot pressed down harder on the gas, the Camaro speeding down the street.

"...Everything okay up there, Hargrove?" Steve asked carefully.

"I'm fine." Billy spat. Billy's eyes met with Teddi's in the mirror. Her big green eyes were glossed over with tears. She looked scared. Scared of him. Billy's jaw clenched as he turned the radio on with an angry jab of his finger. He turned the Judas Priest album up loud enough that no one would be able to speak over it.

Hopper and Joyce were in the waiting room when they arrived at the hospital. Johnathan ran to his mother, wrapping her in a tight hug. Hopper made his way over to Teddi and Billy, placing his hands on their shoulders. "You two okay?" he asked. Billy nodded. He was surprised when Hopper pulled the two teens in for a hug. Billy shifted awkwardly after he pulled away. Teddi was still hugging Hopper. "Hey, hey, what happened, kiddo? Everyone's okay. Will's okay." Hopper assured her.

"El," Teddi sniffed. "She's gone." Billy saw a flash of something on

Hopper's face. Guilt maybe? Hopper wouldn't look directly at Billy. Hopper's jaw set firmly, hugging Teddi closer to him as her tears started up again. Joyce had taken Johnathan to see Will. Nancy, Steve and the kids were all waiting patiently in the waiting room.

Eventually Hopper calmed Teddi. She sat down next to Billy, picking at the hole in the knee of her jeans. She sniffed, looking over at Billy carefully. "...Are you okay? Your leg?" she asked.

Billy shifted in his seat. "I'm fine," he lied. "It stopped hurting back at the Byers," he shrugged. *She knows you're lying*, that voice in his head hissed. Billy's hands clenched into fists. "...I'm gonna go get a drink. You want anything?" he asked. Teddi shook her head.

She watched as he stalked off down the hall, frowning. "What's gotten into him?" Steve asked.

Teddi shook her head. "You got me..." there was definitely something going on with Billy. Teddi would be lying if she said it didn't hurt her feelings a little that he was keeping it from her.

Nancy had turned towards Hopper. "Hop? How did you guys find Will? Wasn't the gate that El opened in that lab?"

Everyone turned to face Hopper. He was silent for a moment. "...We came to an understanding." was all he said. Teddi watched him. He wouldn't look at anyone directly. He was turning his pack of cigarettes in his hands, his foot bouncing up and down anxiously. Teddi thought of the sedans out in front of the school. The same ones that she'd seen at the Wheeler's. With Hopper.

"You sent them to the school." Teddi said. Everyone looked over at her.

"...What do you mean?" Nancy asked, her head tilting to the side as she looked between Teddi and Hopper.

"He sent the people from the lab to the middle school while we were gone. Didn't you? That was the *understanding* you had come to?" she was standing now. Her hands were clenched tightly into fists at her side. "You thought you'd trade El for Will?"

"Teddi-" Hopper stood, holding his hands up defensively. He stepped closer to her, Teddi took a step back. "I *had* to. It was the only way to save Will-"

"She's dead because of you!" Teddi spat. "How *could* you? She was just a little girl!" Hopper said her name again, reaching out for her. Teddi gave his chest a hard shove, glaring up at him through her tears. "I can't believe you would do this to her! To *me*! I was going to take care of her! I was going to let her be *normal*-"

Hopper let out a dry laugh. "Normal? She never would have been *normal*, Teddi. You're sixteen years old. How can you take care of her? You think I'd let her move in with that sick bastard you call a father?" the two glared at each other. "I'm sorry that this happened. I didn't *want* this to happen. But I had to save Will. All of this was to save Will-" He reached out again.

"Stay away from me!" Teddi snapped. Her jaw was clenched tightly, her breathing coming out hard. "I don't ever want to speak to you again after what you've done," she was practically snarling up at him. Everyone else in the room was frozen as they watched on. None of them had ever seen Teddi like this. "I *hate* you." she sobbed out. She didn't care about the hurt look on Hopper's face. Teddi whirled around, storming out of the hospital. She sat on the curb outside, burying her face in her hands and letting out a frustrated scream.

Teddi's eyes hurt. Her throat and lungs hurt. She was exhausted. She wanted to sleep for a week. Maybe she'd wake up and realize this was all some horrible nightmare. Teddi let out a sigh, running a hand through her hair.

"Sounds like I missed the show." Teddi turned, watching Billy walk towards her. He sat next to her on the curb, lighting a cigarette and handing it over to her.

Teddi took a drag, her hands shaking. "He's the reason those people showed up at the school. He told them where El was so he could go through the gate..." she took another drag, passing the smoke back to Billy. "I never expected him to do something like this. He's always looked out for us. I thought he'd *help* with El if I asked..." she sighed again, covering her face. "I told him I hated him."

"Do you?" Billy asked.

"I do right now," she confessed. She looked over at Billy. He looked as tired as she felt. Teddi started picking at her jeans again. "...You would tell me if there was something wrong, wouldn't you? You've been different since the Upside Down..."

Billy looked at her. There was a small smile on his lips, like he thought the question was funny. "Of course I would," he was lying. Teddi knew he was lying. Heart felt like it had dropped to her stomach. Her chest felt hollow and heavy. Like someone was standing on her chest. Why was this happening? Why was she losing people left and right? "...You wanna go see Will? Hopper left. It's safe to go back inside."

Teddi took in a deep breath and nodded. Billy stood, flicking the cigarette away and holding out his hand to help Teddi stand. His skin felt ice cold. Teddi's hand jerked away from him. She swallowed thickly, skirting around him and heading back inside. Billy didn't follow after her.

Will was watching TV when Teddi walked into his room. He smiled when he saw her. Teddi's eyes welled up with tears. He was really there. *Safe*. "...Can I hug you?" she asked carefully. Will let out a small laugh and nodded. Teddi rushed over to his side, hugging him tightly. Will laughed, returning the hug fiercely. "You really scared us, kid." she said quietly.

"I'm sorry-"

Teddi shook her head. "No! No, don't be sorry. I'm just glad you're okay...you're amazing, you know that? I couldn't imagine being in the Upside Down for as long as you were. I was there for ten minutes and I never want to go back." she said with a small laugh.

"You were in the Upside Down?" Will asked.

"It was sort of an accident," Teddi confessed. "We've all been out in Mirkwood looking for you. Me, Billy, Johnathan and Nancy. Steve even helped kill the Demogorgon."

Will's eyebrows shot upward "Steve Harrington? No way."

Teddi smiled and nodded. "Way. It was pretty cool...and totally terrifying," she laughed. "How're you feeling?"

"Way better. Everything was so cold there. It was like being stuck in a thunderstorm for a week. And the Demogorgon...I can't wait to get home."

"You can go home soon. And then everyone is gonna spoil the hell out of you," they both laughed softly. "I'm gonna go get Max and the guys, okay? I'm sure they're probably foaming at the mouth to see you." she hugged Will again.

Will laughed and nodded. "Probably...thanks, Teddi. For everything."

Teddi smiled at Will, ruffling his hair a little. "Anything for you, Will the Wise."

xxx

It was Christmas Eve. A little over a month had passed since the night Will had come home. Things had gone back to normal for the most part. There was no more talk of the Demogorgon, the Upside Down or the like. Teddi still had the occasional nightmare, but aside from that it was all like a distant memory.

Teddi still missed El. It had gotten easier to deal with over time. She still felt guilty. But she could deal with the pain now. Things between her and Hopper hadn't gotten any better. She hadn't spoken to him since that night in the hospital. She didn't know what to say. She was still angry with him.

Things were touch and go with Billy. He still had the occasional episode where his anger would spike. His leg had healed. Still, Teddi knew there was something wrong. He would never admit it. Eventually she learned to stop asking about it. It only ended in an argument.

Now they were at Steve's house. His parents threw a big Christmas Eve party every year that they invited the entire town to. Teddi's parents were there, mingling somewhere downstairs. Teddi had lost

Billy awhile ago. He'd said there had been something he needed to do and hurried off inside. Now she was lounged out by the pool with Steve. They were huddled together on one of the pool chairs, holding their coats tightly around them and passing a joint between them.

"You think Carol's mom is gonna try and kiss your dad under the mistletoe again this year?" Steve asked.

Teddi let out a snort. "*Totally*. She never misses an opportunity...what do you think Billy's up to in there?" she narrowed her eyes as she looked back up at the house.

"Probably banging Mrs. Wheeler." Steve said with a short laugh. Teddi glared up at him. "...Sorry. That was a bad joke...maybe I should lay off a little," he handed the joint back to Teddi. She took a long, slow drag. Steve cleared his throat. "How're things with you guys?"

"How are things with you and Nancy?"

"...Point taken." Steve and Nancy were "on a break". Considering that break had started a week after Will had come home, and Nancy had been spending most of her time with Johnathan, things weren't looking very good.

Teddi leaned back, staring up at the stars above them and swaying a little. "I dunno, Steve...sometimes things are perfect. And then sometimes..." she drifted off.

"Sometimes you wanna punch him in his stupid face?" Steve finished. The two erupted into giggles. Teddi covered her mouth, trying to quiet her laughter as she fell against Steve.

Billy watched on from the dining room. He'd been headed back outside when he saw Teddi and Steve, huddled close together and laughing at something that Steve had said. His hands clenched into fists. *She'd be better off with him*, the voice in his head hissed. *Look how happy she is*.

He hated that voice. It had been there, whispering things in his ear, since that night in the Upside Down. He hadn't told anyone about it.

He hadn't told anyone about the ugly thoughts that he'd had over the last month, or how they were getting worse by the day. He hadn't told anyone that somehow he just *knew* things. Things he had no way of knowing. He hadn't told anyone that sometimes he'd get violently ill. It came on out of nowhere. Everything would start spinning, he'd break out in a cold sweat and he'd throw up this black ooze. Like he was rotting from the inside. Billy was scared. He didn't know what was happening to him.

Billy let out an irritated sigh, shoving the sliding glass door open and heading out towards Teddi and Steve. "There he is! We were just talkin' about ya, man!" Steve called, Teddi's laughter picking up again.

"Oh yeah? About what?" he asked, shoving his hands into the pocket of his brown jacket.

Teddi's laughter died down to giggles as Steve looked up at Billy with a blank expression. "...I forgot." he answered honestly. He and Teddi started laughing again.

Billy rolled his eyes. "C'mon, Teddi. We should get going. I got a surprise for you." he held out his hand to her. Teddi looked surprised. Billy helped her stand, Teddi falling against him in a fit of giggles as she tried to steady herself. Billy wrapped an arm around her, smiling down at Teddi as she looked up at him, biting her lip. *She doesn't love you anymore*, the voice hissed. Billy's arm tightened around her.

"What's the surprise?" she asked.

"If I told you that it wouldn't be a surprise."

Teddi pouted up at him. "Fine. See ya, Harrington! Merry Christmas!" she called over her shoulder, pulling Billy along back up to the house.

"Yeah, Merry Christmas! Maybe *I'll* go hit on Carol's mom." he mumbled sarcastically, falling back against the pool chair.

Teddi was quiet as Billy drove them to her surprise. She simply linked her arm with his, resting her head on his shoulder. He was nervous. He hoped she wouldn't be too mad at him. There was a

chance that this surprise could easily turn around and bite him in the ass.

The Camaro came to a stop outside of Mirkwood. Teddi looked ahead at the woods, frowning. "...The hell kinda shenanigans are you up to, Hargrove?"

Billy let out a small laugh. "Just wait a second, okay? It'll make sense, I promise." Teddi pulled away from him, crossing her arms. Billy's fingers tapped nervously against the steering wheel. Eventually he saw a pair of headlights in the rearview mirror. Teddi spun around, glaring back at Hopper's blazer.

"What is he doing here?" she spat. Hopper got out of the car, a stack of tupperware in his hands. He gave the two of them an awkward wave. "What is he doing here, Billy?" she asked again.

"Just...give him a chance, Ted. Listen to what he has to say."

Teddi glared out at Hopper, her jaw clenching. She didn't say anything as she slid out of the Camaro. Hopper smiled thinly at her. "Hey, kiddo..."

"Why am I here?" Teddi asked coldly.

"Just...follow me. I'll show you," he flicked on his flashlight, motioning for them to follow him. Billy gave Teddi a soft push after Hopper. She let out a soft huff, falling into step beside him. It was strange being back in Mirkwood again. It felt different. Empty. Teddi didn't have that feeling that she was being watched anymore. "There was a guy out here a few weeks back. Came into the police station and said he was attacked while he was out here hunting. A little girl apparently knocked him out and stole his hat and jacket," Hopper explained.

Teddi's heart was hammering hard in her chest.

"I've been leaving food out here for her. I was hoping that she would come to me but she doesn't know me all that well. So I called Billy," Hopper stopped at a small, metal box that was covered in snow. He brushed most of it away, stowing the tupperware inside. "I figured if

she was going to show herself to anyone it would be you, Teddi."

Teddi's mouth opened and closed a few times, looking between Billy and Hopper. "...She's here? You've seen her?"

"Not technically. But someone's been eating all the eggos I've been leaving." he smiled softly. Teddi let out a short laugh, wiping her eyes roughly.

"Told you it was a surprise." Billy grinned.

There was something moving behind them, just above a snowy bank. Teddi could hear the sound of twigs snapping and the crunch of footsteps in the snow. She whirled around, her heart feeling like it could burst out of her chest.

"...Teddi?" a small voice called. Teddi smiled up at her, blinking away her tears.

"El."